

Indiana Doesn't Have Aliens by orphan_account

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Summary:

It's Stranger Things AU but with Star Trek TOS/AOS characters in their place. Spock is Eleven and Jim is Mike.

1. It's Cold Here in Hawkins

Author's Note:

Side note: Ignore any inaccuracies about the 80s. I wasn't alive then and I can't be arsed to care for a fic I slapped together over break.

Side side note: If you want to Scottish-fy Scotty's and Russian-fy Pavel's accents then you'll have to use your imagination. Me trying to copy their accents in spelling would be painfully embarrassing, so at least in my mind they have the average midwestern american accent.

"I'm pretty sure that's not how it's done."

"Sure it is!" Pavel launched up from the folding table, going over to an open area of carpet before promptly flopping onto his back. To aid in demonstrating his point, he curled his legs up till his knees touched his stomach and then spread his legs wide, "See, just like this! I saw them do it once in a documentary."

"What kind of documentaries do your parents let you watch?" Scotty asked.

Pavel grinned, sitting back up on his ankles, "Wandered past a sex ed class full of eighth graders one time. They didn't even know I was there!"

From behind his rulebook Bones grumbled something about supervision for toddlers. To his right, Jim smirked but otherwise kept quiet; Pavel might be the youngest but that could hardly be held against him.

"Are we gonna continue the game or not?" he asked, and Pavel shuffled back to his seat, big grin still plastered on his face. After a bit of resettling, their game of Dungeons and Dragons continued, and before any of them realized it they were thoroughly engaged in the campaign. Bones was just about to roll the dice when a shrill alarm

jerked his hand back, sending the dice skittering off the table.

“Dammit!” he cursed, yanking his backpack onto his shoulder and snatching up the timer to turn it off, “Sorry guys, my dad’s gonna have my hide if I come back late again.”

“See ya Bones!” the boys said, each picking up their own belongings and gathering the game pieces back into the box. Following Scotty out the back door, Pavel bid one last farewell to Jim before heading off down the long route home.

It didn’t take long before all he could hear was the tread of his bike against gravel and the crickets and frogs within the woods on either side of the path.

It took even less time to hear what sounded like footsteps behind him.

Now, for all that his friends gave him a hard time about it, there were many things Pavel was afraid of but one thing he had long since stopped fearing was the way home on a dark night. The human mind could conjure up a myriad of things if it so chose, and it wasn’t the first time he’d thought he heard someone following him only for it to turn out to be nothing.

Generally speaking though, one could not usually hallucinate an icy cold hand brushing against one’s back.

He didn’t turn. He didn’t dare turn. Every single horror movie he’d ever watched told him not to turn. Pavel’s feet couldn’t spin fast enough as he tore off down the gravel road, his ears straining to hear the sound of pursuit or feet thudding against the path. Down the lane, he could make out the lights coming from his house, and he peddled even harder, possibly cursing very loudly and yelling for anybody inside to hear him.

He reached the driveway, then flew past the mailbox, throwing his bike off to the side as he ran up the steps, praying the front door was unlocked. Instead, the door opened for him just as he reached for the handle, and he tripped right into the arms of his older brother.

“Close the door! Lock it! Lock it!” he screamed, and he collapsed on the floor as Hikaru reached over to slide the deadbolt. He peered out through the blinds for a full minute before turning to kneel down beside a huddled Pavel.

“You okay, kid?” Hikaru asked, brushing some of the sweaty curls away from Pavel’s face. The boy had his eyes squeezed shut and his teeth chattered. Hikaru sighed, “Hey, c’mon, at least get up off the floor. The couch would be more comfortable.”

The couch was farther away from the door or any windows, and it was for that reason alone he crawled over, kicked off his boots, and buried himself in the cushions. A few seconds later he heard Hikaru walk over towards him and tuck a blanket around his tiny body.

“All right, now, just take deep breaths and when you’re ready tell me what happened, okay?”

Pavel said nothing, his chest shaking as he tried not to cry. After a few minutes of silence, Hikaru got up and stomped up the stairs. Pavel could just barely hear the upstairs faucet running and the closet door open.

“Hey, I’m fetching some hot towels okay, that’ll warm you up quicker. While I’m heating these up why don’t you shake out of those clothes, they’re probably dirty anyway.”

It took a few minutes, but Hikaru finally came down the stairs, a damp wash rag hung over his arm and a fresh set of pajamas on the other. He stepped out into the living room.

“So are you gonna tell me what got you so spooked, champ-?”

The couch was empty, the blanket strewn carelessly onto the floor. Hikaru groaned and made a mental note to lecture Pavel on cleaning up after himself; their mom was stressed enough as it was. Only when he searched through the rest of the first floor and called multiple times did he begin to worry.

“Pavel! Hey Pavel, where the hell’d you go?”

Silence. The kind of silence that wasn’t empty, that was holding its

breath as if waiting for someone or something to make the first move. The hot towel and pajamas were dumped long forgotten on the couch as Hikaru went through every room, checked every door and window. All locked, except for the back door of the kitchen, and even then the lock had not been tampered with.

He raced out into the backyard, bare feet immediately cold from the dew as he spun around in circles looking for the direction his brother could have gone. There was nothing. No trace or tracks. No little boy wandering in the dark. He rushed back into the house again to continue the search.

Outside, the silence breathed relief, and rushed off into the night.

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Nyota was certain this has been a bad idea.

“Told ya.” Christine sighed, “I told ya we shouldn’t have come. I told you it was gonna suck and that we would be bored and some asshole would try to screw you.”

“Shut up.” she muttered, digging her face into her palms. Of course Christine was right, leave it to her to be the sensible one. But she was never going to admit that to her friend, and besides, the party hadn’t been a total waste: the beer wasn’t a cheap brand and they still got to hang out next to a big outdoor pool.

Of course, they also got to be thrown into it without an extra change of clothes, leaving them to either freeze outside or change in the house. Nyota was thankful she had caught the knowing look on Christine’s face before she naively took up that second offer.

Still, now they had to walk back to the car soaking wet, and there was no way she could explain this to her mother without confessing to the party.

Yep, definitely a bad idea.

“Midterms stressing you out?”

Nyota looked up, “Huh?”

Christine shrugged, "You always get like this when midterms come up. You get stressed out from overloading yourself with studying and then I have to drag your ass back after you go off on some rebellious fling."

"It's not a rebellious... I never....!" Right on both accounts, dammit.

"It's okay, I get it. I just wanna make sure you stay safe. Gotta watch your back, hun."

Nyota wanted to stay mad at her friend, she really did. But they were two frigid cold teenagers huddled together in the middle of the road at midnight. She giggled, and then her giggles turned into shaky laughter. Christine glanced over at her before smiling, shaking her head as she chuckled at the absurdity of the situation.

The light mood stayed that way until she got back home. She was expecting the mood to be ruined by her mother lecturing her on parties and drinking. Instead she found Jim practically glued to the landline, staring straight ahead into dead space with his mouth slightly parted in shock.

"What are you still doing up late, nerd?" Nyota asked, but Jim didn't reply. He looked down at the phone and then mumbled something before shaking his head and hanging up. When he finally turned he blinked rapidly at the sight of his sister dripping water on the front welcome mat.

As if the sight of her sparked something in him, he snapped back to attention, rushing towards her, "You don't happen to know where Pavel is, do you?"

"Why would I know that?"

"It's just... it's just..." he groaned, tugging at strands of his hair. Something he only did when he was very, very stressed. Nyota set her purse down and sloshed out of her socks, heading for the stairs in hopes she could make it to her room before her mother discovered them, "You should get back to bed, I'm sure Pavel was just a little late getting back to the house. Figuring him, he probably got distracted or something."

Pavel was many things, but he was not prone to distraction under threat of curfew. Jim wanted to tell her this, explain, but his sister was already up the stairs, and so he found himself standing there alone in the foyer.

Perhaps she was right. Hikaru tended to be a bit of a worrier about his brother anyway. Maybe Pavel had gone out to the shed to get something and Hikaru simply hadn't searched there? Maybe his mom called and he went out to run an errand? Jim tumbled through a series of increasingly more desperate explanations as he wandered back up to his room, but even as he lay in bed he couldn't help but feel something significant had happened. Something had changed, something that he should be have been paying attention to.

## 2. Whatever Goes Missing

Spock couldn't remember much before the room, and the chair, and the helmet. He knew he was different, that much could be logically inferred from the simple fact that he did not have round ears like the rest of the scientists. Nor, when he bit into one of their arms, did they bleed green. And that should have been enough to deem him Other, an outcast and lonely even as he was constantly surrounded by people. Testing, prodding, poking, scribbling down notes when he reacted. So he tried to react less, if only to see their faces scrunch up with annoyance.

But that was only the beginning really. There was before the 25th and after the 25th, and he remembered that date because it was the only time he ever got to see a calendar as he was racing down halls he has never even seen before. He tuned out the shouts from the scientists hunting him down so he could focus on trying to locate his way through the labyrinth that was his entire world, now rapidly expanding as he slid past dull uniform offices. He was sure if he turned one more corner he would find a door that would lead somewhere out into Indiana, the only word he knew for something that wasn't the Lab. It was to Indiana he was running, it was Indiana that kept him going even after he tripped up and bruised his knees.

Suddenly, a rough hand locked onto his shoulder and twisted it till it popped out of its socket, rendering him helpless as he howled in pain. The scientists who grabbed him didn't even look at him as he took some sort of restraining device out of a colleague's hand. Usually, Spock cringed and let himself be taken away at this point. But perhaps it was far-flung dreams of Indiana that made things turn out differently on the 25th.

Before Spock could entirely realize what he was doing, the man's neck snapped cleanly to the side, and he crumbled to the floor as the other scientists shrieked and fled back down the hall. One of them was frantically punching numbers into a phone, and one looked over the edge of their clipboard as they scribbled down notes. The group stayed there for several minutes as Spock sat in the middle of the hall on his bruised knees, the lifeless body of his abuser displayed on the



floor like a sacrifice. It *was* a sacrifice; that's what he was told later, a necessary sacrifice for the gain of the greater knowledge. And knowledge was something Spock could appreciate, but god it came at an awful cost.

Spock could not move even when the scientists got closer, or even when they parted to let a tall man in a pristine lab coat announce his presence.

"Hello there, Spock. No need to be afraid, you've done very well today, quite the little surprise you gave us!" he knelt down at Spock's eye level, "I'm Papa. Can you say my name?"

"Papa." Spock mumbled, and he didn't have the energy to object when Papa took out a handkerchief from his lab coat and used it to wipe the blood dripping out of Spock's nose.

"I must say, I knew your kind has proved to be telepathic but I had no idea there was potential for telekinesis."

"Am I bad?" Spock asked, lip trembling. He wanted so badly to hide his tears, but the dead body of the man still lay so close to him, and he wanted to go home, and he wanted to go back to his blankets and pillow and crayons.

"No no, this was merely an accident, it happens to the best of us. Don't worry, we're going to help you learn how to use your gifts for good. This... this is simply a new beginning."

After the 25th Spock never had to face the old group of scientists again. This time there were new people, still with their needles and their poking and their prodding. But things were better now because there was Papa, and things were worse because his gift required many sacrifices, and throughout however much time passed beyond the 25th, he was never quite sure what greater knowledge was to be gained from them.

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Comfortable bliss lasted for all of 7 hours in Hawkins before school began and it became increasingly more obvious to the population of

Hawkins Middle School that the loud, cheerful voice of Pavel was nowhere to be heard among the halls. Though few students cared, many were gossips, and by the time the first bell rang there was already a few stories fluttering around about that *brother of his* .

“Didn’t arrive home last night, huh?” Bones asked, snapping his locker shut.

“I got a call from Hikaru last night; he came home but then he disappeared after a couple of minutes.”

“Like what, into thin air?” Scotty snuck up from behind, hand stuffed deep into a chips bag. Bones reached around to grab a few and his friend swatted at him. Their laughter was cut short by the sight of Jim pulling at his hair.

“Urgh, listen, Pavel’s in danger, I just know it! Why would he go outside again for no good reason?”

Scotty shrugged, “Maybe he saw something?”

“Like what?” Bones munched on a chip he’d pilfered.

Jim shook his head as if trying to organize his thoughts, “I don’t know, but Hikaru said he came in all scared about something. Told Hikaru to lock the door.”

“Oh shit.” Bones said, his full attention now on Jim. The three huddled together in a circle around his locker.

Jim nodded, “Yeah, exactly! This is serious. I bet Hikaru and his mom have already been to the police.”

“Then let them deal with it, they could do better searching than us.” Scotty said, checking his watch while looking longingly at his classroom door. When neither Jim or Bones responded he trashed his bag and waved goodbye, “Listen I’ve got a first hour exam, okay? If we don’t hear anything by lunchtime we can regroup then.”

It wasn’t much of an assurance, but it was something. Jim trudged along beside Bones to their chemistry class, already feeling like his stomach was twisting itself in knots.

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Considering one of their fellow schoolmates could have been murdered in cold blood or kidnapped, the vast majority of the middle school population remained calm for the rest of the day. The trio rejoined as promised for lunch, but got nowhere further than making themselves even more sick with worry. It wasn't until school finally got out that Jim tore off for his bike, not entirely sure what he was going to do but determined to do it.

"We could try the police department, right? They'll have a Missing Person notice out by now, we can make sure they got all the information correct. Maybe we can help!"

"Jim, I know you mean well but there's not a whole lot we can do." Bones leaned on his handles, "I mean I'm game to drop by, but I doubt they'll want a bunch of kids getting in their way."

"But we're not just kids, we're Pavel's friends!" Jim yelled. Scotty slowly nodding in agreement. That made it two against one, with a reluctant third 'yes' after some more bickering.

The sight that greeted them at the police station was even more depressing than they imagined. Hikaru and his mom sat in plastic chairs, knees knocking together and biting nails as they waited for the sheriff to get off the phone. He had apparently been tied to the line since morning waiting for feedback from his few officers as to the whereabouts of Pavel. Judging by his face, it was an increasingly fruitless search.

"We've been everywhere, absolutely everywhere!" Pavel's mom explained, her eyes wide and bruised from lack of sleep, hair a frizzled curly mess. Hikaru looked like he was going to leap out of his seat any moment, but he held still long enough to give Jim a considering look, "He wasn't at school then I suppose?"

"No, sorry." Jim frowned, staring down at his shoes, "We were hoping if we came here we could be of some help."

"Is there any place he'd feel safe hiding? Any special places you guys hang out at?" Hikaru asked. The brief light in his eyes dimmed when

the three shook their heads.

A phone slammed onto its receiver. The group turned as one to look at the sheriff, who was currently running a hand through greasy hair as he breathed out a curse. Spotting the kids, he wiped his mouth and muttered what could have passed for an apology before walking around to lean against the front of his desk.

“And you are?” he gestured to the trio.

Jim stepped forward, “James Kirk. My dad’s George Kirk and I’m one of Pavel’s best friends.”

The sheriff smirked, “Well hello James Kirk son of George Kirk. Good to have you guys here, maybe you can help us out with some information.” he gestured to the nameplate on his desk, “Sheriff Pike at your service. Now what’ve you got for us?”

“Not much,” Jim admitted. He winced, but Bones quickly stepped up to his side with Scotty right behind him. Bones placed a comforting hand on his arm.

“We just want to help in any way we can, sir. Last night we were playing at Jim’s house and we all left about a quarter past eleven.” Bones explained.

“Wow, up late were you?”

Scotty nodded, “Sir, I was the last one to see him before he headed off for home. We walk a little bit in the same direction for awhile, I’d say we split around 11:30 or a little after. He was just as happy as ever I’d seen him!”

“You didn’t hear anything following you? Didn’t get the feeling like maybe you were being watched?”

“No, sir. I didn’t hear a thing, and if Pavel heard something it was definitely away after I went home.”

Sheriff Pike straightened up and walked over to a map he’d spread across his desk, “Right so... about where would you say you split?”

Scotty pointed on the map, and Jim peered over his shoulder. There was only one long road between Scotty's house and Pavel's. They called it Mirkwood, and it was an appropriate nickname. Just thinking about having to go off the path at night made him shiver.

"So Pavel hears or sees something along this road, runs home, and..." Pike turned to Hikaru, "Do you know if his bike is still there?"

Hikaru looked to his mom for a moment before nodding slowly, "Yeah, yes still in the front yard, kind of thrown off to the side a little ways from the front porch."

"Right, so Pavel comes inside, has the door locked, but he's still scared. Let's say he sees something or hears something that makes him feel like he's no longer safe in the house, he goes out the back door, hence it being unlocked but not forced. Where would he run from there?"

Hikaru shrugged helplessly, and for a moment it seemed they were stuck again. Then Scotty whispered, "Enterprise."

"Hmm?" Pike looked up from the map.

All eyes were now on Scotty, and he fidgeted under the attention. He shook his head, "Nothing, continue."

But Scotty wasn't listening as Pike started to talk again. He nodded towards his friends and they slowly edged out the front door till they were standing out in the police parking lot. Bones crossed his arms, "Okay, what weird idea did you have this time?"

Scotty shifted nervously, "The Enterprise. It's out a little ways behind Pavel's house, he might've gone back there."

"We haven't played there since two summers ago."

"Yeah but..." Scotty sighed, "That's why I didn't say anything in there."

"No, we can check there! It's worth a try at least." Jim patted Scotty on the back, grinning with a renewed sense of purpose.

They rushed off for their bikes, and began the trip to Mirkwood. Somewhere out there, hidden in the forest that was much nicer in the day than at night, there was a small wooden fort that had served them well for many summers, whether it had been as a castle, or a house, or their latest fixation: a spaceship.

Perhaps the Enterprise would hold the answers they searched for.

### 3. Whatever Turns Up

By the time they got out to the Enterprise the sun was beginning to set below the horizon. Jim could already hear his mother lecturing him about catching phenomena, but this was all for Pavel so surely she'd excuse him his lack of warmer clothes once she found out why he was traipsing through the woods at twilight.

Jim remembered now why they had named the forest Mirkwood when they were kids. He did indeed feel like little Bilbo, having lost his way within the tangled webs and branches. Most of the brush was clear enough now that the leaves had wilted during the winter, but it was still careful going as Scotty and Bones argued with each other about which way would get them to the hideout. Eventually they began to agree and become more assured in their directions, till even Jim could recognize the surrounding area of the fort. The group finally rounded a bend, and there in a small clearing was the Enterprise herself.

It lay abandoned, its tarp covering tattered from the ice and wind. The wood was scratched and raw and some of it had caved in on itself, but otherwise it was still intact. Their latest addition had been some salvaged metal siding Bones had snatched from his dad's dump of a yard, and that was where the fort had held up sturdiest against the elements. But otherwise it was unremarkable and disappointingly bleak.

Jim got to the entrance of the fort first, and already it seemed too small for him, smaller than it had been the summers past. Jim pushed aside the towel that served as a door and stepped inside, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the dark.

He could hear Bones entering in from behind him when suddenly he was shoved back out the way he came and landed in a thud on his back. Bones fell a foot behind him and immediately got up, eyes wide with excitement.

"Pavel? Hey kid, it's us! You're safe now!" he yelled, rushing back into the fort, "You idiot, thinking we were some kinda monster, why'd you have to push--"

His sentence abruptly ended with a chilling scream.

Jim didn't even bother with the towel as he threw himself headfirst into the fort, tackling whatever was inside. He felt teeth bite into the skin of his wrist and he shrieked, trying to wrestle with his attacker. Bones yelled at him from his right and together they managed to grab onto the creature and pull it out into the open, where they fell in an exhausted heap.

Seconds later, Bones remembered to turn on the flashlight he'd brought with them, and the three stared in shock at the sight that greeted them.

It was a boy, or at least it kind of looked like a boy,. It was skin and bones, sickly pale skin with a stark line of green running out of one nostril, two big brown eyes and a head of slick black hair that had grown a bit long and knotted. But no long enough to hide pointed ears.

"It's an elf!" Scotty breathed.

"Don't be a dumbass, Scotty, of course he's not an elf."

"Look at his ears! He's an elf!"

"He's obviously a very sick and injured boy, maybe it's some sort of birth defect."

"Birth defect?!"

Jim ignored the pair and leaned in closer, cautiously edging toward the now despondent child. It stared at him in fear, like a caged animal that was too tired to run or fight, so instead it froze. Only when he tried to reach out and touch the boy did he notice the teeth marks on his wrist and thought better.

"So what do we do with him? I mean we can't just leave him here!"

"Oh joy, who's gonna bring *this* home to their parents? Cuz it's not gonna be my old man!"

"He can stay in my basement," Jim said, and for once the two seemed



more than happy to agree with him. He stood up and wiped his hands on his jeans, and then reached out to the mysterious boy.

“Hello, we mean you no harm. We promise.”

The boy stared back at them with no sign of having understood, so Jim tried again. He pointed at his chest, “Me. I’m Jim Kirk. Jim... Kirk.”

“Oh christ, Jim, how are we even gonna convince him to get back all the way to your house? We’re out here in the middle of the woods, Mirkwood no less, the nearest home is Pavel’s and he ain’t there so that’s another thirty minutes or more back to your place if we can convince this thing to ride a bike with one of us.”

The reality of their situation wrapped around them like a chilled fog. Suddenly Jim was all too aware of the various creaks and noises of the night. Twigs cracked and crickets chirped and an owl hooted in the distance. He even thought he heard a small voice.

“Huh?” he turned back around

“Is this Indiana?” the boy asked, eyes wide with wonder.

Jim grinned, “Yeah, this is Indiana. You from somewhere outside of Indiana?”

The boy nodded but said nothing else, although he looked much more relieved now that he knew where he was. It was enough to get him on his feet, legs trembling like a newborn fawn, and Jim and Bones helped him make the walk back to the bike.

The ride to Jim’s house passed by quicker than expected, now that they knew what they had to do. Or at least, they had a vague idea of a plan. A ghost of a plan that haunted the terrified eyes of the boy riding behind Jim, arms clutched around his waist as if holding on for dear life.

It wasn’t much to go on, and they weren’t anywhere closer to finding Pavel, but perhaps this strange child would know something about where lost children went to hide in the darkness of Mirkwood.

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Finding something for the boy to eat proved challenging. At first they tried some strips of jerky Jim kept around in the basement, which the boy promptly turned down as soon as he found out what they were. Then Jim made an extra special mission into the pantry to snatch a chocolate bar. That seemed to be going well until after a couple bites when the boy mentioned he didn't like the fuzzy feeling it caused in his brain.

They settled on waffles. Without syrup. Cold because the microwave would make too much noise and served on a paper plate. Not a great meal for a kid who was so thin they could see the outline of his rib cage through his shirt, but he seemed to enjoy it. As much as anybody could who stared off into space as they silently shoved down cold bits of waffle.

The next step was figuring out who he was.

"You speak English, we know that much, and you're from somewhere outside of Indiana, correct?" Jim settled down across from him at the folding table.

The boy nodded and continued to eat. After washing it down with a gulp of water he finally spoke, "I am from the Lab."

"Whoa, what?" Bones stopped short, first aid kit already in hand. He carefully approached the boy before using a warm washcloth to wipe off some of the mud from the kid's arm. "So... let me get this straight. When you say 'the lab' you mean like... sci fi shit right?"

The boy stared, barely blinking as he watched every move Bones made. When Bones opened the aid kit for bandages the boy spotted something inside and yanked back.

"No! Hate doctors! Hate needles!"

Jim glanced at the kit, "Huh, oh those are just some epipens, in case I have an allergic reaction. Don't worry, we won't use them on you. Bones is just making sure your wounds don't get infected."

The boy's eyes glazed over, his mouth echoing '*infected*' , before he

extended his arm again to allow Bones to clean him up.

"I'm Jim, and now you know Bones, and he's Scotty. What's your name?"

The boy blinked a few times, then cleared his throat, "I'm... Spock."

"Spock?" Jim frowned, not entirely sure if he'd heard that right. Then again, what else should they expect from a strange kid they found in the middle of nowhere?

Spock nodded, "Yes, that has been my name for as long as I can remember, though only a few at the Lab ever called me by my name."

"Ugh, this is creepy!" Bones said, slapping a bandaid over a scratch on Spock's arm, "By the way, what's all this green stuff you got on you? It's not toxic is it?"

"It's my blood." Spock said simply.

"Your... blood? Seriously?"

"I am always serious."

Bones inspected some of Spock's other wounds, until he made his way to the dried trail of "blood" running out of Spock's nose. When he tried to clean there Spock jerked back, taking the cloth from him and wiping roughly over his mouth. Bones threw up his hands in frustration.

"I give up, this kid appears to be telling the truth. He really does have naturally pointed ears and his blood really is green. Well now I've heard everything!"

"We haven't heard where Pavel is." Scotty said.

Bones turned around, "Yeah and that's another thing, while we're here playing 20 Questions with this kid, Pavel could be out there starving and freezing to death, or worse!"

Jim stood up, "Well what are we supposed to do, go back out there?"

Like you said, we'll just be a bunch of kids getting in the way!"

"Guys?" Scotty said, "I think you should see this."

They turned in time to see a toy spaceship floating several feet above the ground. It halted in front of where Spock sat intently staring at it, before Spock closed his eyes and the toy clattered to the floor.

The room was silent for several moment. Then Bones picked up his flashlight and pointed its bright light directly at Spock, "Okay who *the hell* are you? Green blood, elf ears, 'the lab', now you can make things fly? What are you, some sort of mutant?"

Spock didn't seem too affected by bright lights pointed into his eyes, and he remained calmly monotone, "I am not like anybody else. And I am the only one to have my gift."

"This is freaky."

"Shut up, Scotty." Bones muttered, "Okay so you're a special snowflake, where did you come from exactly? How did you get to that fort in the middle of the woods?"

Spock tilted his head, his sharp eyebrows turning up, "There was an... what did you call it earlier, an 'infection'? It spread out of the wall and into the hallways and everyone was so busy with that, I slipped away without being noticed. I couldn't stay there because I knew what caused the infection, so I found this drain pipe that I crawled out of and then I was in Indiana. I ran until I saw your fort and I hid there until you came."

Jim nodded encouragingly, stepping forward while motioning for Bones to turn the light off, "Okay, that's great, we can work with that."

"I don't want to go back to the Lab!" Spock suddenly shrieked, backing away.

Jim held up his hands, "No, no, it's okay, we're gonna make sure you never go back there, it's okay. We just wanna know that the bad guys who hurt you will pay for what they did. If we know where they are we can make sure they never hurt you again."

Spock did not say anything after that, so eventually they gave up and Bones and Scotty decided to go home. They whispered to Jim best wishes as they walked out the back door, and warned him to watch out for “Spock’s superpowers”. And then it was just Spock and Jim alone in the basement.

“So... more waffles?”

4. Paper Figurines

Summary for the Chapter:

Ugh this chapter was sooo long! Anyway check the tags cause some squeamish stuff is being brought up in this chapter (the first bit is from Papa's point of view). Also later in there are some allusions to child abuse going on, but I tried to keep it as necessarily brief as possible.

Happy Thanksgiving folks! (And happy fic update Thursday to everybody else!)

The phone call came in at 2:30am. He had sluggishly pulled himself out of bed, fumbling with the receiver expecting yet another tirade from some foreign investor demanding results under threat of funding cuts. An excuse was already forming in his head when a rushed, breathless voice yelled at him from the other end of the phone.

Jackpot!

He didn't remember throwing on a pair of pants and a jacket, nor the entire ride up to the site, but he could never forget stepping out of the car and jogging up across the crest of the hill. Men everywhere, all with flashlights, some with guns, all of them heading towards the crash. Spotlights cast the craft in an otherworldly glow. A scene straight out of an old science fiction movie.

Most of the occupants of the craft (which were studiously not being named "aliens" as there was no such governmentally-recognized entity) had been dragged out and now kneeled awaiting their fate. As he picked his way down the embankment and into the sunken ground, one of them jerked its head up. Fierce eyes glared at him, but otherwise the being remained emotionless, as if the whole affair of being captured was too unseemly to deserve a response.

It was love at first sight. He wouldn't have described it that way then, but it was definitely love that was planted within him that night. A

possessive, thorny love that wanted to reach out and never let go. An invasive love that wanted to dissect and categorize and experiment till every last drop of truth was wrung out.

The child came after that.

And what an exciting opportunity to see a newborn! It was not easy to handle, but with fragility came the ability to mold and to shape to design. He personally did not bother with the child for its first five years, as he'd heard it was frail and defenseless and could reveal no special data outside of what they'd already collected from the adult bodies.

He decided otherwise when the child broke a man's neck using only its mind. And with this newfound ability for telekinesis came funding for a new project. The scientific possibilities had quickly become endless!

It was a cruel irony then that his greatest experiment would begin and end with a phone call that came in the dead of morning.

"We caught this about an hour ago; thought you might want to hear it." an assistant said, handing him a pair of headphones. As the recording started up, there was a thunk as the other end picked up and a woman's voice broke the silence.

"Hello, I need... I need to talk to Sheriff Pike right away ple-please! Please! It's urgent! I... it's about my kid, my son is gone and I just got a call from him! I heard him breathing on the other end of the--"

"Ma'am can I get your name please?"

"Mariya Chekov, I need to talk to Sheriff Pi--"

"I'm sorry, he's out on patrol looking for a missing kid--"

"Yeah, that's my kid, I just told you I got a call from him that's why I need to talk to the sheriff! I heard him!"

"Please describe exactly what you heard and when, ma'am."

A frustrated sigh. *"I got a call a couple minutes ago from my son, I could*

hear him breathing on the other end and he was, oh god he was so scared he was so.... And there was this sound, like.... Like an animal of some kind, I don't know it was... I don't know something more than that but then the line went dead and there was a bolt of electricity that ran through the line and it destroyed my phone!"

"... How are you calling me then?"

"I'm at the drugstore, about a mile from my house, ran the whole way. Now listen I need to talk to the sheriff! Do you know how I can reach him?"

"I'll patch into him over the police scanner and we'll see what we can do, ma'am. Just stay right where you are--"

"No are you crazy ! I need to be home in case--"

"Well then please go on home, but stay there . Do you have someone who can be with you?"

A long pause. Then Mariya hung up suddenly, and the recording screeched to a halt.

"Damn." he shook his head, fists digging into the desk. It'd be just their luck another child would be caught in the whole ugly mess. First they'd lost their last living specimen of the project, and now another local child was dragged away too.

"What do we do now, Dr. Marcus?" one of the scientists asked.

He groaned and closed his eyes, briefly hoping all his problems would vanish in a flash. When it didn't he turned around and picked up a worn, fraying telephone book, "We find that kid before the sheriff does. Get that lady's address and load up the van."

He slammed the book down in front of the assistant, and marched off to go suit up for a ride to the outskirts of Hawkins.

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Jim went an entire school day worriedly glancing at his watch, wandering from one class to the other in anticipation of getting back



home as soon as possible. He'd left Spock in his basement with explicit instructions to not leave, not make any noise, and definitely don't let my parents see you. Spock only nodded once and went back to fiddling with Jim's walkie talkie.

"What do you mean he's still at your house? He's gotta go, man, I'm serious!" Bones said when they met up at lunch.

"I couldn't just dump Spock out in the street and tell him to fend for himself." Jim argued, "And anyways, when I came down this morning to sneak Spock some breakfast, he'd found some photos of us all together. You know for that science fair project we won?"

Bones jabbed a fork into his sludge of a school meal, "Yeah, and?"

Jim leaned in conspiratorially, "He recognized Pavel. He actually pointed him out from the rest of us like he'd seen him from somewhere else!"

"Woah, really?"

"Yeah, really!" Jim grinned, leaning in even closer, lunch abandoned, "If he saw Pavel the night he disappeared, maybe he can take us to where he last saw him. It's a better lead than wandering around Mirkwood."

Bones sighed, "Well... fine, ya got a point. Let's just hope your parents haven't found out our little pointy-eared secret."

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Uhura pushed open the door to the basement with her hip, managing to catch a sweater as it nearly fell from the basket of dirty laundry hugged tightly in her arms. She'd been down that flight of stairs enough times to navigate them without looking, which was good as she couldn't even see her own feet. She pried the washer door open and began to chuck handfuls of laundry in, so concentrated on her chore that she didn't even notice the sound until she was halfway finished.

The sound was like an animal... no, not quite. She had excellent hearing and she could tell it wasn't a snake or a mouse or even a

raccoon slipping in from the cold. It was bigger, deeper, but layered over with static and a tiny beep.

She realized what the static was and groaned, turning around to look at where a long tablecloth had been draped over a table. She couldn't fathom why Jim would do such a stupid thing as stay home from school, but she knew the sound of his walkie talkie.

"Hey nerd, mom's gonna have a fit when she finds out you played hooky today." she sneered, pulling up the tablecloth. She shrieked when the face that greeted her was not Jim at all.

"Who... wait who the hell are *you* ?" she asked, flipping up the cloth again and dragging the strange boy out into the open so she could get a good look at him. Upon seeing the number of bandages and bruises on the child she immediately let go, her tone changing from harsh to concerned.

"Oh man... hey are you okay? Does somebody know you're here, did you find a way in from outside?"

The boy eased at her calmer voice, but still hugged himself and refused to look up at her. He mumbled, "No one can know I'm here, you're not supposed to know."

Uhura frowned but continued to check the boy for injuries. He shrunk away from her touch but otherwise remained still.

"Okay, well, you can't hide in our basement forever. Are you a friend of Jim's? Does he know you're here?"

The boy winced and nodded slowly, "Protecting me. Can't go back."

"Where are you from, honey, do you have any parents?"

"Parents'... Papa?"

Uhura smiled encouragingly, "Yeah, your papa, where is he?"

The boy refused to say anything else after that, so Uhura settled for going back to the laundry, "Once this load is finished drying I'm gonna find something that fits you so you don't have to stay in those

rags, okay?”

While waiting, the two found themselves sitting in comfortable silence across from each other at the folding table. Uhura had just gotten up to unload the dryer when the back door opened and Jim and his gang rushed inside. At first her brother only saw the boy and ran to him.

“Oh good, you’re still here! I kept hoping nobody would find you, I don’t know what I’d do.”

“Better start thinking quickly then, nerd.” Uhura slammed the dryer door shut.

Jim whipped around, eyes burning, “You!”

“Yes me. The one who’s babysat your friend for the last forty minutes and offered him a fresh pair of clothes, which I see you were not generous enough to hand out.”

“Now that’s not fair,” Scotty piped up, “We found food for him last night and made sure he had a warm place to sleep. A lot better than where we found him!”

“Scotty.” Bones warned.

Uhura leaned forward, “When you say ‘found’... you mean you actively went out to search for this kid? He didn’t just land on our back doorstep and you decided to adopt him?”

Jim rubbed the back of his neck and glanced at his friends, “I... we didn’t plan on finding him. We’ve been searching for Pavel and instead we, uh...”

“Picked up a stray.” Bones muttered.

“Does your stray have a name?” Uhura asked, picking out a set of warm clothes for the boy. She walked over to where he sat but he did not take them from her, “Don’t worry, Jim doesn’t need these clothes anymore.”

“Hey!”

She shrugged, "They're ugly on you, they'll look better on him."

"My name is Spock."

Uhura turned back towards the boy and smiled, "Spock? Well, guess I can't complain, I've heard weirder. Do any of you know where Spock's father is?"

"Father?" all three boys asked in unison, triple looks of confusion on their face.

"Yeah he mentioned somebody named 'Papa'. He wouldn't say anything after that, though. I figure he's a runaway."

Jim and Scotty started talking over each other and a flood of questions poured out, but Uhura paid little attention to them. Instead she watched as Bones quietly walked over to Spock and carefully knelt down in front of where he was sitting.

"Hey kid, I'm gonna show you something, but you gotta promise we keep this between ourselves okay? Nobody outside this room knows about it all right?"

"What is a... promise?" Spock asked, "And what is this 'friend' the lady keeps referring to?"

"Friends..." Bones paused, trying to find the best way to explain such a seemingly simple concept, "Friends protect each other, look out for each other. They keep promises, which mean you have to do what you say you'll do, no exceptions. And... and sometimes friends tell each other secrets, secrets parents can't know about."

As he finished his sentence, he carefully pulled down the turtleneck he was wearing. Jim grimaced, knowing already what Spock would see. Spock's eyes grew wide with understanding at the sight of giant red bruise marks curled around Bones' neck, in the shape of two hands.

"Your Papa?" Spock asked.

Bones nodded, "Yeah, that's what Papas do, don't they? Did your Papa hurt you too?"

Spock wrapped his arms around his drawn-up knees, “He told the others to do it. And uh... they used a lot of...” Spock glanced at the first aid kit strewn on the floor.

Bones followed his gaze, “Oh, the needles huh?”

“Lots and lots of needles.”

Uhura stepped forward, “Could someone please fill me in?”

“Apparently this kid is from someplace he calls ‘the lab’. Totally freaky stuff, kept talking about how there was an infection and he had to escape through a drain pipe. He’s a runaway all right, but not from any shitty home life I’ve ever heard of.”

Silence fell over the room as each of them stared at the other for some solution to their increasingly staggering problem. Finally, Jim turned to Spock, “This morning you pointed to a picture of Pavel, like you’d seen him before. Can you tell us where you last saw him?”

The boys eagerly sat down around the table, encouraging Spock on as Jim retrieved the picture. It showed the four boys standing proudly around their first place trophy for the science fair (on radio frequencies of all things, the nerds). Pavel was the shortest of them but had the biggest smile, curly hair only a little shorter than the night he disappeared. Spock pointed to him and the others motioned for him to continue. When he only sat there puzzled, Uhura cleared her throat.

“Is it possible Spock could draw some clues as to where he last saw your friend? Maybe he simply doesn’t have enough vocabulary to accurately describe the location.”

Spock eyes brightened as he sat up, “Crayons?”

It took a bit of time but they found crayons (Spock refused to use a pen as that was ‘only for adults’). They all sat back down again with a sheet from Scotty’s notebook and waited for Spock to started drawing.

Instead, he began to tear off strips of paper and fold them into rough humanoid shapes. One was shorter, and he colored its head yellow.

“Pavel?” Jim asked.

Spock nodded and began to color the other, much taller, figure completely black. He then laid the rest of the paper out flat and set the two figures on top.

“What does the flat paper represent, Spock?” Uhura asked.

“Indiana.” Spock answered simply, and then he flipped the paper over rapidly. He grabbed a crayon and began scribbling black all over the back side of the paper. When he was satisfied with the result, he placed Pavel and the other figure on the black side.

“And where are we now?” Uhura squinted at the display.

Spock shivered, “A bad place.”

“Can you describe the bad place, honey?”

“ *Honey* ?”

“Shut up, Jim.”

“It... it is dark there. It looks the same as Indiana, and the Lab, but it is darker. And there is a monster there.” Spock tapped on the tall figure.

Scotty jumped up, clapping his hands, “Oh! Like the Vale of Shadows!”

When no one seemed to know what he was talking about, he grabbed his D&D rulebook out of his backpack. He flipped to a page featuring a long description and a picture of a dark forest.

“See? The Vale of Shadows is a parallel world that’s darker than ours, like an evil mirrorverse.”

“Like an inverted image.” Uhura mused.

“Yeah,” Scotty grinned, “An Upside Down. That’s what we’ll call it!”

“It. is. a. game!” Bones shouted, slamming his fists on the table.

Spock curled up into a little ball but Bones didn't notice, "You are talking about fantasy, something that can't possibly exist! The Vale of Shadows isn't real and neither is this... this Upside Down!"

"Well how else do you explain Spock's description?"

"Nuts. Crazy. We found the kid hiding out in our old playhouse, what do you think would have happened if we didn't go out there?"

They all looked at Spock, curled up with his head tucked between his knees, and Bones came over to sit by him, wrapping him up in a hug, "Hey, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have shouted like that. We're just really stressed out about finding Pavel, okay? If we ever make you feel unsafe again let us know."

Uhura pulled a chair up to the table, "You know, as odd as this may sound I wouldn't discount his dark world description just yet. I mean the kid does have pointy ears."

"Why didn't you freak out when you first saw them?" Jim asked.

She shrugged, "Strange kid, strange ears, barely talked and dressed in rags. I tried to address the more immediate needs. I figured if anything it was some weird birth disorder."

Bones shot a smug look Scotty's way and then resumed placing a comforting hand on Spock's shoulder. He suddenly froze and jerked his hand away.

"What was... did you... can you read my mind?" he asked.

Spock blushed an odd shade of green, "I am getting better at controlling it, but even with multiple tests they could not get me to fully contain my gift. Do not worry, it is only activated through touch."

Scotty's jaw dropped, "Wait, you can move stuff with your mind and you're telepathic?"

Uhura frowned, "And you guys are having trouble swallowing the idea of an Upside Down? With *this kid* sitting around in our basement?"

Now that she mentioned it, a dark mirrorverse was starting to sound like a fairly logical idea in comparison to the enigma that was the strange boy they found in Mirkwood.

Jim groaned, "So... Pavel, he gets kidnapped by this monster from the Upside Down. He gets taken with the monster into this dark parallel universe and now... what? We can't just explain this to the police, they'll think we're crazy! And Pavel's mom isn't gonna believe us, and our mom certainly won't. What do we do?"

"I know someone who will listen." Uhura said, "Or, at least, be more willing to listen than your average adult. Why don't you try Hikaru?"

Bones snorted, "Hikaru? Hikaru knows how to fence, I'm not telling him his brother is somehow on another plane of reality."

"No but he was there the night Pavel disappeared; he might have information he didn't think to tell the police!" Jim said, leaping up from the table.

"Whoa whoa, hold on!" Bones pointed to Uhura, "How do we know she's not gonna go snitching to your parents?"

"Because I'm going with you." Uhura said primly, pulling on a pair of boots, "I'm going to make sure you kids stay out of trouble."

"Nah, you just know that if you snitch I'll tell mom about how you got soaking wet at a study session." Jim winked, dashing out the back door. Uhura rolled her eyes and shouting for the boys to wait a minute outside. She then turned back to Spock, motioning towards the pile of clothes.

"I left a beanie in there for you to put on over your head. Nobody will see your ears that way. And make sure you wear the coat too, I don't want you getting sick from a lack of immunity." she called as she headed out the door.

Jim was eager to get going so they could be closer to finding Pavel, but he had to admit, he might've tripped up a bit on his bike when he saw Spock come out of the basement wearing one of his beanies. He cited his reddened cheeks as a side effect of the cold, and tried not to

think about Spock when he sat behind him on the bike and wrapped his arms around him for support.

5. Signals From the Past

Summary for the Chapter:

Finally got some time to write between school work! I can't guarantee that I'll be posting regularly over the next couple weeks simply because finals are coming up and I have studying to do (RIP me), but I do love this story so much and will definitely have it finished before Christmas. Enjoy!

EDIT: reworked some of the chapter so the timing made more sense.

It was a horrible night to be out on a search for a missing kid, but the strong winds and occasional thunder in the distance promising rain had done nothing to stop them from entering the forest anyway. The men combed their way through the woods, the beams of their flashlights sweeping along the underbrush and past trees with long shadows. Dogs pulled along on an unseen trail, and amongst the group of officers there were two lonely men.

Unlike the others, the two men were dirty and tired and had barely eaten or gotten sleep since Pavel had gone missing. They'd spent hours pouring over a map and making calls, arguing about whether or not to check Pavel's stepdad's house. In the end it was them who agreed to another search through the woods surrounding the Chekov house.

Lighting flashed close by, almost immediately followed after by a clap of thunder. A few of the men paused but continued to call out Pavel's name, and Christopher Pike glanced up at the sky with worry.

"Rain shouldn't be here for another twenty minutes or so I think. Can't be sure though. When do you need to get back home?"

The boy who walked beside him shouldered his backpack and trudged onward, "I'm not going home anytime soon. Not until we find Pavel."

“Kid it’s almost midnight, don’t you have school tomorrow?”

Hikaru went silent. Pike opened his mouth to ask the question again when his scanner fizzed to life at his hip.

“Sheriff Pike?”

He unclipped the scanner and held it up so both he and Hikaru could listen “Yes Janice go ahead, what’s up?”

“I got a call from the mother of that kid you’re looking for... Mrs. Chekov? She sounded pretty upset and she claims her son called her on her phone a few minutes ago.”

“Woah, what?”

“I don’t know sir, she said he was just breathing, not talking or anything, and something about animal noises? I’m not sure how she’d know it was her son. I had her stay home.”

“Good Janice, thank you, I’ll send one of the guys back to check on her.” Pike said, putting away his scanner.

Hikaru stood close beside him, but instead of looking hopeful he seemed more worried than before. When he saw the look on Pike’s face he shook his head, “She gets like this sometimes. It’s... it’s worse than I ever seen it but it’s not... it’s just how she copes with stuff.”

They walked on for some time, listening to the calls of the men above the rush of the wind and the sway of leaves. Twigs snapped under their feet and Hikaru readjusted his bag, staring intently out into the darkness.

“What do those boys call this place again?” Pike asked.

“Mirkwood.” Hikaru replied, carefully stepping over a fallen branch. “It’s a nerd thing, those kids have been into that kind of stuff for years now.”

Pike nodded, even though he was fairly certain Hikaru couldn’t see him, and stopped on the edge of a dry river bed, gently pulling on Hikaru’s sleeve for him to stop.

“What is it?” Hikaru asked, looking back.

Pike grimaced and braced himself for the conversation he’d been meaning to have for awhile now. He lowered his voice, “I know it feels like I’ve asked you this about twenty times already, but, now that we’re alone, I mean... is there anything, anything at all that would cause your brother to run away like that?”

In the faint light he could just make out the silhouette of Hikaru’s head tilting down, shoulders slumping. “Yes.” the boy muttered.

Pike stepped forward a bit, “What is Pavel afraid of, Hikaru? What would make him feel like he needs to hide?”

Just then, a dog started barking in the distance, and an officer shouted, “Hey chief, over here!”

The two took off through the trees, tripping over brush and bramble till they slid down an embankment, to where the dry riverbed originated. There, embedded in the side of the hill and lit starkly by the glow of three flashlights, was the dripping, gaping maw of an old drain pipe.

“He wouldn’t.” Pike breathed, stooping down to look into the hole, “No way a kid would go in there!”

“Dog found this.” the officer held up a scrap of cloth, which Pike handed directly to Hikaru.

He held the cloth up to the light and frowned, shrugging, “Doesn’t look like the clothes he was wearing that night. I don’t know if he even has anything like this. What is this supposed to be anyway... some kind of hospital gown?”

“Hikaru, look at me.” Pike said softly, and waited till the boy’s tired eyes stared into his own. “Would Pavel hide in something like this? If the dog caught onto his scent then the cloth must have been in contact with your brother somehow.”

Hikaru nodded slowly, “He’s great at hiding. I don’t know why he would go in there, but he could fit if he had to. I just... I just...”

Wish there was an explanation that made sense. Pike thought grimly, and walked over to Hikaru, clapping a hand on his back. After a moment, he pointed his light up the embankment, where the dirt led up to another line of closely-packed trees bristling in the wind.

“Where does this pipe lead to?”

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Hikaru had only just set his backpack down after a gruelling long day at school when several small fists knocked on his door. Voices argued with each other, before a calmer voice said something and then the doorbell rang.

“Okay already, I’m coming!” he called, marching over and flinging the front door open. Four kids stumbled in, and a girl from his high school stood behind them shaking her head in mock despair.

“What are you kids... uh, hello, is there something I can do for you?” Hikaru asked, straightening up at the sight of the girl. She rolled her eyes and extended a hand.

“Nyota, I’m Jim’s older sister.”

In front of her, Jim stood with hands behind his back waiting impatiently, while Bones and Scotty glared at each other over some silent disagreement. It appeared the gang was all there and same as ever, except...

“And your friend?” he gestured to the stranger hiding behind Jim. The boy blushed an odd shade, if Hikaru didn’t know better he would have said yellow or green, and Jim smiled proudly.

“This is Spock. And uh... he’s kinda the reason we’re here. We think he might know something about where Pavel is.”

*Oh god not today, not after a whole night of searching, not from that whiny kid and his annoying friends, too exhausted for this shi--*

“I’m afraid this is all a bit sudden, Hikaru, but I’ve heard their case and I think they may have a point. It’s at least a place to start.” Nyota said.

Hikaru let out a long sigh and then stepped to the side, motioning them forward. He slammed the door and then waited for the lot of them to plunk themselves down on his couch. The kids sat in silence, glancing at each other nervously while refusing to look at Hikaru.

“Well? What’ve you got?” he sat down on the coffee table, preparing himself for the worst, even though a small part of him wanted more.

After a while, Nyota cleared her throat and leaned forward in her seat, “Spock here is apparently a runaway my brother found out in Mirkwood last night.” When she noticed Hikaru did not react to that, she continued carefully, “Jim brought Spock back to our house and was showing him some pictures when Spock pointed to your brother in one of them. He recognized Pavel by sight; he’s seen him before.”

Hikaru perked up, still wary that this strange child, with such a strange name, could be of any hope.

Jim sat up, “Yeah, and when we asked Spock where he’d seen Pavel he drew us a picture. Well, sort of, it was more like origami but I mean he still got his point across--”

“Yeah great, *and...* ?” Hikaru interrupted.

Both Jim and Nyota frowned, and Bones mumbled something under his breath. It was Scotty who ended up speaking.

“Spock's seen what chased your brother out of the house! He knows where it's from, and we think it took Pavel back with it.”

“It? Back?”

All eyes were on Scotty, which was becoming an uncomfortable trend he found himself placed in. “It is some kind of creature, we’re not sure how to explain it. But we do know that it comes from this place... this sort of darker parallel version of our world. There was this gateway between here and the other place and it slipped through and...” his voice trailed off as he tucked his head down. Said out loud, without a helpful D&D display, the idea seemed pathetic.

Hikaru shook his head, “You guys are crazy.”

"Told ya." Bones said.

"Good thing for you I'm crazy too." Hikaru continued, standing up to open his backpack. Out of it he took out a camera and carefully held it up with both hands. "Pentax MX. Spent forever saving up for it, so don't even think about touching it."

"You're a photographer?" Nyota asked.

He shrugged, "A hobby." He sat back down on the table with a handful of developed photos, "A few days ago I was out in the woods taking some pictures of the sunset through the trees. Thought it might be good to have a couple nature shots... but then it was getting dark and I heard something off to the side, so I got out my camera. Didn't see anything at first, but I got them developed later and... well." He handed the top photo to Spock, who timidly reached out and accepted it.

The boys leaned in together to see what it was. At first, nothing out of the ordinary. A couple of trees in the foreground, the backyard shed off to the side. But there, just briefly a flash of movement, a tall lithe being that perhaps walked on two legs. It was so blurry, so hard to tell unless they knew what they were looking for, but it was proof, some vague form of evidence that at least some of what Spock was saying held truth.

"Is that it, Spock? Is this the monster?" Jim asked.

Spock nodded slowly, eyes focused intently on the picture. When he said nothing, Nyota asked to see the photo and studied it herself. After a few moments she shrugged and set it back down.

"So... is this it? This is the best you have?" Hikaru asked, "I am really supposed to believe my brother was kidnapped by a monster and taken to a parallel dimension?"

"But you just--"

"Jim I took one blurry photo of something that might be not-human. I can believe that, maybe, there is something or somebody out in those woods that made my brother run away but frankly at this rate

I'm having better luck with the sheriff scouring the woods all night." Hikaru stood up, slapping the photos down. "This... I... I'm just... I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I shouldn't be rude. You are trying your hardest and I know you mean well. He's your friend, I... I understand."

The room was silent for awhile, before Hikaru excused himself, leaving the group to sit alone in the living room.

"I thought you said he'd believe us?" Jim said.

"No I said he *might* believe you." Nyota scowled, smoothing out her skirt, "Frankly he did better than I was expecting."

"Well then what do we do now?" Scotty asked.

"We track it down." Bones said, standing up, "My old man used to take me out hunting, Jim you remember that one winter he dragged me out in freezing weather? Yeah well turns out at least some of that was useful cause I learned how to track. If you want to hunt an animal you either wait for it to come to you or you stalk it down. We can't go with option one because who the hell knows when that thing is gonna show up again. I say we declare open season on monsters."

"And did your dad teach you how to hunt something we don't even know for sure exists?" Nyota asked.

Bones pointed to Spock, "He'd know, right? I mean he's seen the thing, he should know better than any of us what it looks like and how to find it."

Jim turned to Spock, gently cupping his hands in a pleading gesture, "Can you find the monster for us? Maybe if we know how to get to it we can find out where Pavel is?"

Spock stared at their joined hands and blushed deeply, squirming a bit before nodding. When Jim let go of his hands, he scooted closer on the couch to Jim till their legs were pressed side by side.

"I believe I require the communication device you use." Spock said.

"A phone?" Scotty asked.



Spock shook his head, motioning with hands as if to cup a very large brick to his ear, "I think you call them, uh... 'walking talkings'."

Jim laughed, "Oh, hold on a sec!"

When he realized they had all left their backpacks at his house, he ran automatically to Pavel's room, opening the door expecting to find everything in its place like before Pavel had left, walkie talkie safely placed on the bedside table.

Instead he found Pavel's bed surrounded by lamps of all sizes and shapes, and sitting on the bed in the middle of them was Pavel's mom. She looked up startled at him, but did not seem too worried that one of Pavel's friends had suddenly burst into his bedroom.

"Uh, hello ma'am." Jim said shyly, folding his hands behind his back.

Mariya Chekov smiled at him, "Hello Jim. What are you doing here?"

"I um," Jim scanned the room quickly, seeing how much of it was in disarray and yet still felt oddly untouched, "I was just leaving actually. Sorry ma'am."

He backed out of the way he came and shut the door, breathing a sigh of relief. But the moment was left bitter as he walked back to the living room empty handed. For some reason, out of all the things Pavel had owned, only the clothes on his back and his walkie talkie had gone missing with him.

Which meant... wherever Pavel had run off to hide, he had planned on being able to communicate.

"Back to my house, now!" Jim shouted, tearing through the living room, throwing open the front door, "I think Spock's onto something, c'mon!"

"Wait what? What's going on?" Bones asked, charging after him.

"We're not going to track down Pavel! We're going to talk to him!"

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MARUS EXPOSED

GOVERNMENT DENIES ANY INVOLVEMENT IN EXPERIMENTS

Pike sat up in his creaky hard library chair, squinting at the microfiche scanner's inverted black and white screen. He'd been scrolling through mind-numbingly long rolls for any references he could find to "Hawkins National Laboratory". None of his officers knew a single thing about the lab at the other end of the drain pipe, except that it was the government's business and heavily guarded.

In other words, they couldn't just walk through the front door. Didn't stop them from trying though. After pleading with the guard at the front gate, he got nothing more than a blandly polite man in a suit named Dr. Marcus, who showed them a security tape of the woods outside the complex. Nothing.

Hence why he was spending his afternoon hunched over in front of a dusty screen. It was only after he decided on a whim to search for the name of the scientist that his luck began to change.

"Dr. Marcus is rumoured to have worked in several labs around the country, including most recently Hawkins National Laboratory in Indiana. Previously, Dr. Marcus was involved in tests on animal sensitivity as well as electrical brain stimulation (EBS). It is rumored his interest in EBS later led him to perform on human subjects, many of whom were young females ranging from the ages of 19 to 25. One of these women, Amanda Grayson, has filed a lawsuit against Dr. Marcus and several other staff members of the research lab. Dr. Marcus' attorney in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Energy asked the details of the lawsuit be sealed until further evidence..."

Pike tapped his fingers on the wooden desk as he scooted up closer to the screen. Aside from relatively normal clips on the lab opening, there has been very little in the papers about the lab itself. But this Dr. Marcus was turning out to be promising, if eerily grim. He flipped to another microfiche.

He read a few words in and then froze.

"Grayson, the only one of the research participants to come forward,

claims to have been subjected to psychedelic drugs as well as electroshock stimulation in a project named TARSUS IV. Subjects were forced to have unknown stimulants injected into them which gave them superior strength and resistance to hotter temperatures. According to Grayson, she discovered she was pregnant a few months after the experiment started, and when the baby was born it was taken from her. The subsequent lawsuit filed against Dr. Marcus for possession of her child has been closed due to lack of evidence."

"Christ." Pike muttered, running a hand through his hair. Whoever this woman, Amanda Grayson, was, he had a high degree of respect for her. But what on earth had happened to her? To stand up to her captors after almost a year of abuse and then... the newspapers articles stopped there. The lawsuit was dropped and there was no more Amanda Grayson and no more Dr. Marcus.

Except, he had talked to the man in question this morning. Dr. Marcus, apparently not as innocent as the law believed him to be, was still safely behind the barbed wire fences of Hawkins National Laboratory.

Tarsus IV. Nothing else showed up on the reels. Nothing in the newspapers; whatever is had been was covered up, only mentioned in one or two other lawsuits which were also quickly shoved under the rug. As far as history was concerned, it never happened.

And none of it had anything to do with Pavel.

"Right? Am I getting this right? None of this has to do with Pavel." he said to an empty room. Dust trickled in a beam of fading light shining through the window. Another hour or so and it would be time for dinner. He could grab a sandwich, get back out on the search through Mirkwood. They'd already checked the stepdad's house, all over school, talked with his friends. Nothing.

He stared down at an old photo of Dr. Marcus and a group of young women all dressed in gowns. Hospital gowns, just like the kind of material they had found in the drain pipe. His eyes settled on the determined, bright face of Amanda, looking so hopeful at the beginning of a brand new trial that promised exciting advances in the understanding of the human brain. Such a great amount of courage

for a woman so devastated.

He ended up skipping the sandwich altogether and drove back to the Hawkins National Laboratory. Except this time, he didn't bother knocking on the front door.

6. How to Ask Nicely with a Fist

Summary for the Chapter:

Finally finished all my finals and I'm no longer brain dead from it all! Which means I got around to writing the next chapter and I'll attempt to get this finished before Christmas. Enjoy! Comments and kudos appreciated.

(I just now realized that technically speaking Pike should be a police chief not a sheriff, but eh, I don't really know what the difference is and I don't feel like it matters much to the plot.)

They were halfway back to Jim's house when they began to notice the vans.

At first Jim paid them no mind; he was used to Hawkins Power and Light driving around town and showing up for various repairs. But when Scotty shouted something and he looked back, he saw four vans all following behind them in single-file. And they were rapidly catching up to them.

"Follow me!" he shouted, telling Spock to hold on tight. He ran his bike off the side of the road into a ditch, and then back up the other side into a suburban yard. He could hear his father's voice admonishing him for tearing up a pristine cut lawn, but the roar of the vans' tires made him speed up. Scotty and Bones were right behind him, panting loudly as they pushed hard on their pedals, and the three bikes raced through a thankfully unfenced backyard. Their momentum carried them up another small slope and then out onto the road, pushing as fast as their sore legs allowed. For a blissful moment it seemed as if they had gotten rid of their pursuers, and then the sound of engines charged up from behind.

"We can't go back home, we gotta hide somewhere else!" Bones yelled.

"Where?" Jim shouted back, not daring to look behind. Spock clung

tightly to him, face buried in his jacket as his fingers dug into Jim's chest. He wasn't going to be much help. They couldn't go to Jim's house, where they would be cornered. Same with the Chekov house. Maybe the Enterprise could work if it wasn't so far away and in the opposite direction. Where could they go? Where could they hide all four of them and three bikes?

Suddenly, something large swerved out from a side road to cross right in front of them. Jim jerked the bike to the side, swooping around the halted car that he barely caught a glimpse. He could hear Bones and Scotty doing the same.

Scotty cheered.

"What? What is it?" Jim asked. He could feel Spock turning around slightly to get a look at the car that now acted as a roadblock between them and the vans. Jim skidded to a stop and did the same, just as all four vans halted.

From the grey Ford car, two teens swung open the doors and stepped out, staring defiantly at the men in suits who had gotten out of the car to see what was going on. It took Jim a moment to recognize that he was looking at Hikaru and Nyota.

"Yeah Hikaru, beat em up!" Scotty shouted, pumping his fist in the air.

Hikaru turned to look back at them for a second, scowling, "Get out of here kids, we aren't doing this for nothing!"

In a gut-twisting moment, Jim realized that Nyota and Hikaru were buying them time. And not much of it considering how close the vans had stopped. He yelled to Bones and Scotty and then started pedaling again, trying not to think about what might happen if those two didn't get back into the car and drive off before the men got to them.

Through seemingly endless pathways, yards, and ditches the group went, ignoring the burning in their legs as they continued to press on, minute after minute, not really knowing where they were headed but pressing on anyway. After twenty minutes of non-stop riding, Jim finally reached the junkyard that Bones' dad owned.

As soon as he pried himself off the bike he collapsed, letting Spock be the one to carefully lay the bike down against an old bus. Bones and Scotty were far less careful with their bikes as they tossed them aside and joined Jim in an exhausted heap. Spock continued to stand a few feet away, awkwardly shifting his feet.

“So,” Bones gasped, coughing, “We still don’t have a way to communicate with Pavel or find him, and now we’re... we’re fugitives?”

“I’m too young to be a wanted man.” Scotty mumbled against his arm.

“What do we do now?” Jim asked.

“Walking talking.” Spock whispered. The trio looked up at him and squinted, and Spock rolled his eyes, pointing at Bones, “His. We’ll use his.”

Bones sighed, sitting back on his ankles and dusting the dirt off his jeans, “Well, my old man isn’t home for a couple of hours so yeah, we can probably use my walkie talkie. But I’m still not sure how this is gonna work.”

They found the walkie talkie hidden under Bones’ bed. Both Jim and Scotty had briefly been there before, only once as Bones didn’t like to linger around his house. But Spock took in the worn-out couch and the cigarette marks on the walls with wide-eyed wonder. When they entered the bedroom, he quietly sat down on Bones’ bed and discovered it had springs, bouncing up and down with a small smile on his face.

All eyes were on Jim for an explanation. He sighed and scratched the back of his neck, “So... when I went into Pavel’s room his walkie talkie wasn’t there. Everything else was there like it had been before but his walkie talkie was gone, and Pavel doesn’t usually bring it with him to D&D so--”

“So he took it with him before he disappeared.” Bones mused, thumb rubbing at his lip, “I guess that means he wasn’t dragged directly out of his house then. But how did Hikaru not hear anything?”

Scotty's eyes widened, "Not hear. See! What if Pavel was already in his room and he saw something, so he grabbed the walkie talkie out of panic and before he could yell to Hikaru, who wouldn't be able to hear from over the running water anyway, he gets kidnapped by the monster?"

Bones shook his head, "Good theory, but Pavel's room doesn't have a window."

"Walls," Spock murmured, knees drawn up to his chest, "The monster goes through walls. That's how..." he stopped talking, hiding his face behind his folded arms.

Jim kneeled down in front of Spock, offering a kind smile, "You can tell us what happened Spock. It'd really help us out. Please?"

Spock took a deep breath, squinting his eyes closed and rocking back and forth. Jim finally sat down next to him on the bed, wrapping a comforting arm around him. Spock stilled and slowly let his head rest on Jim's shoulder, trying very hard to not let any of tears spill out.

With one word came another, and another after that, until he found the story spilling out of him uncontrollably. The boys watched his with rapt attention as he laid out, piece by piece, the story of how he had found the Upside Down.

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Papa gripped onto Spock's shoulders, making sure he was paying attention. Spock couldn't force himself to look into Papa's eyes no matter how hard he tried, so he settled for listening as the man explained the importance of this experiment. The importance of the work they were doing here. How important Spock was; the only one who could do what they needed him to do.

Spock had been in the Bath before. He had been in the cold silent inky black world. The last time they had made what Papa deemed "progress". To Spock, the man in the funny fur coat who spoke in a funny language was a passing attraction, an oblivious object to be observed like the rats in the metal cages.



But there was one thing that had been lurking in the corner of his eye for the past few trials. Something that seemed to be vaguely aware of his presence. That last time, Spock could even swear he saw it turn and face him.

He didn't feel fear. Of course he didn't, that was illogical. But whatever feeling crept inside his chest and lingered there still sat heavy within him as he walked slowly to the Bath that night. He went through the motions of putting on the electrodes and the helmet, stepping off the lowered platform and waiting for the black world to swallow him whole.

*This time we're making contact. Can you do that for me, Spock?*

Spock knew the only answer to that was yes. He would have to try, regardless of how comfortable he felt. His comfort didn't matter; he was an emotionless alien like all the scientists said he was after all. But still, as the walls closed in and sealed him within total darkness, he felt the heaviness in his chest return.

He opened his eyes. There was nothing in every direction, and he whirled around a few times concentrating hard on the glimpses of what he had seen before, until finally he turned and saw the back of the creature hunched over in the distance. He tip-toed over to where it was, Papa's voice pounding in the back of his head. He had to do this. He didn't want to go back into Isolation. Not again, never again.

He touched the creature.

For a brief second nothing happened. It was the last second Spock had in the world he used to exist in. The feeling in his chest lifted. He could tell Papa he tried, and he could go back to his room and never have to do this again.

Then the monster turned around. There were no eyes. There was no nose. It opened its face like a fly trap and it stood up, looming over Spock as it tried to catch his scent.

Spock never remembered screaming. But by the time he was finally lifted out of the tank scientists were running around the room screaming and looking at the far wall in horror. Bricks and plaster

were pushed aside as dark green vines tore open and lunged into the room, dragging one of the technicians into its swirling grasp. And from the wall came the monster, no longer in the black world but here in the Lab. And that was when he realized he could never go back to his room. With Papa, at least he had to use doors, but if the monster could go through walls Spock had no other option but to flee. So he ran. And ran. He remembered the last time he had done this, when his younger self discovered his power to control and move things with his mind. But this time it was different, because no one cared about him anymore, and no one chased after him. He kept running until he got to a pipe that led out... out to where, he did not know.

It was only when he crawled out of the drain and fell into an exhausted heap on the forest floor that he knew what open space looked like. There were no walls in Indiana, just trees everywhere... and it just kept going. He looked up at where the ceiling should be. No ceiling, just something that was as dark as the black world in the Bath.

He walked for awhile, stumbling and tripping over himself until he found a strange little shelter made of metal. For a moment he was relieved, if only to find someplace to curl up for the night.

When he opened the flap he heard a scream, and he saw a shivering boy huddling in the shelter, clutching tightly to a strange box.

It was too much. It was far too much, too loud. It was the first time he had ever seen a human the same age as him. He clutched his ears and darted off into the woods, hiding behind a nearby tree. When the screeches came, and he heard the sound of the monster, he was too afraid to look. Too scared...

Perhaps he had been too quick to assume he felt no fear. What clutched at his chest that night was stronger than anything else he had experienced before. And when there was silence again, he did not retreat into the shelter until a lot of time had passed. He did not sleep that night, the boy's screams echoing in his ears, and he did not move from that spot until a strange boy with startling blue eyes stepped into the shelter and his life changed once again.

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Hikaru had absolutely no intention of getting back in the car. The moment he saw the long line of vans chasing after the bikes he knew exactly how this was going to end, at least if he had any control of it. Nyota sat beside him, clutching the side of her seat and eyes wide. He hadn't expected her to get out with him, but once again she surprised him. They both stood tall and firm, staring down the men who had possibly abducted Pavel and who were trying to harm the boys. There was no way they could have drove off in time to save themselves without throwing away any time they could have bought for the boys to escape. So they stayed, even when the man in the lab coat yelled down their necks and the men with guns came out of the backs of the vans.

There was no use pretending it was an accident, although decking one of the men in suits might have been a little excessive in making sure that none of them went back to the vans and try to drive around them. The last thing he remembered was being shoved against his car and a needle of some kind being injected into the side of his neck. He woke up in a small, poorly-lit room with a double-sided mirror on one wall, a chair and table in the center of the room.

He groaned and knocked his head back against the concrete floor, trying to catch his breath. He felt like his ribs has been pummeled and his forehead smacked against a brick wall, and his arms refused to move as his body slowly recovered from the tranquilizer.

On the other side of the mirror, Marcus stood with hands behind his back as he paced across the room. He never liked this part; covering up the evidence, doing away with the witnesses. Clean-up never was as much fun as the actual experiments.

His assistant swiveled around in her chair and raised her voice, "The sheriff showed up about an hour ago, just around sundown. Security guard found him on the top level and before he could call it in the guy knocked him out cold. He left right after that so I don't think he saw anything. But still, we're gonna need to keep an eye on him."

Marcus sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose with his thumb, "Unfortunate. I don't know why that bastard can't just leave well

enough alone.”

“What do we do with the two kids? They go missing for too long and somebody’ll have seen something. We’ll have the entire police force down here.” his assistant said with a deep frown.

“Also unfortunate, because if I let them go they will most certainly spill the entire story to their parents, who will then bring the police force down on us as well.”

The room was silent for a minute as Marcus tapped his finger on the table. The pace sped up as he began to formulate a plan, switching over to rubbing his hands in slow circles together, “Here’s how it goes. We let the kids go, but instead of going home they get a bit too curious. They want to play at being spies, so they stick around in the woods outside the lab, where the other kid went missing. It’s already dark, anything could be lurking out there. They go missing and our hands are washed of it.”

“And how do we know they’ll stick around? Maybe the boy would, but that girl looked ready to bolt.” she said.

There were times when Marcus could admit to himself, deep down, he was stressed far beyond what his paycheck covered, but he was seldom ever worried. There was always a backup plan, a contingency fiddling around in his mind. After some more minutes of contemplation he explained the plan to his assistant. Her eyebrows shot up and she bit her lip. Risky. Very risky. But if they could pull it off, that would be two less nosey kids to worry about.

Fifteen minutes later, the door to Nyota’s interrogation room opened and a petite woman who looked oddly similar to her stepped in. Her hair was drawn up in a ponytail almost the same length as her own, and if she wasn’t paying attention she could have mistaken her for a doppelganger.

“Wha-- who are you? Where’s Hikaru? What have you done to him?” she demanded.

“You’re going to have to take off your clothes.” the woman said in a dull voice.

“What?”

“I said,” the woman walked right up to her, bare inches from her face, “I’m going to need to take your clothes.” She dumped a bodysuit unceremoniously onto the table beside her and then stood on the other end of the interrogation room, never letting Nyota out of her sight, “No tricks. Just get changed.”

When Nyota was led out into the hall in her new uncomfortable bodysuit, she saw Hikaru standing a couple doors down wearing the same thing. Whatever was going to happen to them, they were apparently going to be doing it together. They were shoved into an elevator with oddly-opening horizontal and vertical doors, and then the lift sent them down, down, down, until they felt the it stop. When the doors opened Dr. Marcus was standing there with two other scientists and a group of security guards. The scientist were holding up two hazmat suits. Beyond them, the dark hallway gradually evolved into a tangled mess of coiling vines.

“What’s happening? Where are we going?” she whispered.

Hikaru shrugged his shoulders, letting himself be dressed in the suit. Before they put his helmet on he looked at Nyota with she saw a fleeting expression of paralyzed fear. And then her own helmet was put on, and she stared out at the shadowy gloomy world she was now being led towards with grim finality. After a certain distance, only the scientists dressed in their own protective suits went with them, the rest heading back to the elevator.

They rounded a few corners and then opened a door, and there in the center of the room was a giant water tank. And behind it from the wall gaped the heaving maw of a toxic jungle, fleshy plants beating as if they were the heart of the laboratory.

Before the two could protest, the scientist shoved them forward and into the waiting arms of the slimy vines. Nyota held her breath and tried to squirm, but the hold on her grew tighter with each tug, and then she found her being spit out onto the other side. She tripped and fell, jerking her head up to take in the alarming world of inky darkness and drifting ash. It took everything in her not to sob.

They were in the Upside Down.

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Pike had barely managed to get out of the lab in one piece, and he certainly didn't stick around afterwards to see how fast security would come to take him down. Neither could he just go back to his trailer and twiddle his thumbs at a lack of answers.

The alternative he came up with didn't sound much better.

The house was a small structure with weeds climbing up the sides and surrounded in a field of waist-deep grass. All of the windows were covered, and as Pike stepped onto the porch he could hear the old wood creak beneath him. He couldn't particularly judge: his trailer was in even worse shape, but it didn't give him much confidence that someone would be there to answer.

It took three tries at the doorbell and loud knocking before he could just barely hear someone skitter up to the door. After a pause, a lock slid across and the door opened, revealing a petite woman with silvery hazel eyes and hair twisted up into a bun.

Pike tilted his head down, "Excuse me, ma'am, is there an Amanda Grayson here? I need to speak to her."

"Who's asking?" the woman said, her voice even and almost emotionless.

"Sheriff Christopher Pike, Hawkins Police Department." he showed her his badge and she nodded slowly, then opened the door further, gesturing him in.

The inside of the house was nothing like the outside. A colorful runner led him down the hall to the living room, where neat piles of various craft supplies, balls of yarn, and magazines were stacked on a red wingback chair and a chipped pastel blue coffee table beside it. The walls were covered in artwork and bright pottery, and though the windows were heavily covered they were dressed with white silken curtains. A muted TV set stood opposite of a plush sofa, where the woman had been sitting.

“Excuse the mess, I’ve been busy these past few days with grading essays.” she said, shoving aside a stack of papers so Pike could sit on the sofa beside her.

“Oh, you’re a teacher?”

“Two chemistry classes and a physics class, and quite a handful of energetic middle schoolers.”

Pike smirked, and then, when she said nothing else for several moments, he took off his hat and cleared his throat, “So, I take it you must be Amanda Grayson?”

The woman nodded, “I am she. What was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

*Time to see how far her hospitality stretches.* “I uh... well, a couple days ago this kid, he’s eleven years old, he went missing and we’ve been looking all over for him. We can’t find him. So...” he paused, wincing, “the closest thing we have to a lead is in connection with this place called the Hawkins National Laboratory. Do you know about it?”

“You wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.” Amanda said in a low voice, the emotionless tone present again.

Pike frowned, “Look, I totally understand if you’re not comfortable talking about this, I--”

“Pardon me, Mr. Pike, but if I judge the type of person you are correctly, you won’t leave this house without some sort of information as to what’s happened to that child.” Amanda lip quirked, “You’re persistent. But you also need to be more blunt.”

“Yes ma’am,” Pike replied, fidgeting in his spot, “I had dug up some old newspapers and one of them said that you were involved in an experiment called Tarsus IV. Is that correct?”

A long sigh. Amanda closed her eyes and nodded, “It is. I was twenty-three back then; naive and had no idea what I wanted to make of myself. When we were originally told what the experiment would entail, it was supposed to be a revolutionary study of the mind. Just a light, ticklish flow of electricity applied to the brain and people could

memorize more, shoot with better accuracy, learn quickly. Some of it was true. But a couple weeks in I came to the lab and I didn't come back out."

"They forcibly held you there? In Hawkins National Laboratory?" Pike asked, leaning forward in his seat.

"I believe it went by another name then and they changed it after I sued them. But yes, I was held captive there with a number of other women around my age. We lived there for *eleven months*. God knows why nobody thought to check in on us before then. I suppose you tend to trust people in suits and lab coats more than the average person... You look cold, are you sure you don't want a blanket?"

"No, I'm fine ma'am, please continue." Pike said, getting out a pocket notebook and starting to scribble down notes.

"Well, if you insist. I found out later on that the reason they suddenly kidnapped us was because before that they didn't think the experiment was going to have much more funding. But then they found... well they found something that made foreign investors very interested and they decided to go the whole way. We'd already signed consent forms and had no means of communication." Amanda shuddered, her hands squeezed tight in her lap.

"What did they find? I'm assuming Dr. Marcus was included in this experiment?"

"Oh yes, he was the lead scientist. Very smart man, but horribly possessive and controlling. I'm afraid I can't tell you what they found; you wouldn't believe me."

"I wouldn't say that. I sneaked in there two hours ago to try and find out what was going on."

Amanda stared at him, mouth agape, "You broke into the lab and yet you're here asking me about what happened in there? If you believe your missing child is in the lab why did you not find while you were there?"

"It's a little more complicated than that, I'm afraid. You see we... I



think Pavel, the kid, saw something he wasn't supposed to and that's why he went missing. Now I went in there and I did get a little ways through the ground floor, but I think they are hiding far more than they admit."

A small smile graced Amanda's face, "Persistent indeed. I think we'll get along just fine, Mr. Pike." She stood up and walked over to a bureau where she pulled out a small, faded piece of paper. The writing on it looked like something a person would write with their non-dominant hand, and some of the spelling was a bit off.

"Would you believe this was written by an adult man of brilliant intelligence, Mr. Pike?"

Pike squinted at the writing, shaking his head before noticing some of the language used in the letter was technical, oddly standing out amongst elementary-level English. The final two words on the page were not in English but rather a strange, vertical script that was much more practiced and elegant. "It was written by someone who wasn't used to writing horizontally and in English."

"Very good." Amanda sat down again and looked at the letter, smiling, "I've saved this for twelve years. This... this was the only letter I have left written by my husband, Sarek. Did you know I had a husband?"

"No. Did... was he aware of what happened to you in those months?"

"Or more than aware, he was being held captive there just like me, it's how we met. He and his crew were what Dr. Marcus found... And he was also an alien."

Pike blinked, and when Amanda saw the look on his face she smirked, "Told you. No one else believes me either, but despite being told for months after I was freed that everything I thought happened was a hallucination, I can promise you our child was *not* an illusion. We were two very lonely, scared people who sought comfort in any way that we could. But if I had known I would become pregnant... I never would've. I didn't want it to happen. But... but between all the drugs they put into our system and the sense deprivation chamber and countless tests it was so hard to think during that time, to keep

track of days, to know what was going on. I'm lucky to be alive, but Sarek's immune system couldn't keep up, and neither could any of the other in his crew."

"The baby?" Pike asked, hating that he had to push this woman back into dark memories.

Amanda quickly wiped away a stray tear and continued, "He was so very beautiful. Big brown eyes like mine, and pointed ears like his father's. I got to keep him for two weeks and then they took him away from me. After that I... it was like I snapped out of a trance. I was so angry and hurt and when they finally released me after extensive attempts at brainwashing, I chased right back after them demanding they return what was rightfully mine. I... I..." her voice trailed off, and she turned to hide her face, body shaking.

Pike set a comforting hand on her shoulder, "I'm truly sorry I had to ask you all that, ma'am. If there's anything I can do--"

"There isn't." Amanda sighed, turned back around, "But you can help another parent by finding their missing boy." She put on a tight smile.

The walk back to the front door seemed far longer than the way in, and when Pike stepped out onto the porch he felt a twist in his gut. She had been through so much, too much already...

"Wait, wait, hold on a second." she said, leaning against the front door.

"Yes, ma'am?" Pike asked, turning around.

"Listen I... if there's anything I can do, anyway I can help find that little boy, just call me?"

Pike smiled, "Will do, ma'am. Take care."

The small woman seemed to shrink even smaller into herself, arms wrapped tight and head tilted down, but she smiled slowly, "You too, Sheriff Pike. Watch your back."

Pike opened his mouth to thank her and then his scanner buzzed,

telling him to come back to the police department. He nodded a final goodbye to Amanda and then headed back towards the car, looking back only once in the rearview mirror as the bravest woman he had ever met walked back into her house with her head held high and a stack of papers still to grade.

## 7. Lit Match

### Summary for the Chapter:

Almost there. I might end up writing the final chapter of this fic after Christmas as I won't have internet for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Have a happy holiday season and I hope you have been enjoying this story! I'd love to hear any comments you might have!

The voice was barely there, lilting between fits of static, barely above a whisper, but it was there. Spock sat cross-legged on Bones' bed, eyes calmly shut, as if he was the only one in the room. They sat there for a few minutes, squirming in their spots as they waited for Spock to find -- if he *could* find -- Pavel, lost somewhere out in that intangible Upside Down.

And then it was there. Static briefly faded as a small sing-song voice threaded itself into the mix, cut in staccato as the boys strained to hear what seemed impossible.

*"I'll be here ... end of time ... so you gotta let ... know ... should I stay or should I go?"*

Scotty wiggled in his seat, pointing at the walkie talkie and grinning, "That's him! It's Pavel, it's gotta be!" he motioned rapidly to Spock, "Can we talk to him? Talk to him!"

Spock opened his eyes and slowly shook his head, "Sorry, I can only hear."

Scotty flopped back onto the bed with a groan and Jim and Bones leaned forward to try and listen better. It was definitely Pavel's voice, but he sounded so frail and weak. Even without the static he seemed tired, singing only to keep himself from giving up. It twisted Jim's heart into knots, to hear Pavel in so much pain yet out of their reach. They had to do something! If he was still alive... if they could just find some way to locate him.

"Can you track him down? Can you figure out where he is?" he asked.

Spock looked into his eyes and seemed ready to answer negative, but then he paused and squeezed his eyes closed, biting his lower lip. He fumbled one hand in the air, as if he was physically trying to search through his brain, "Maybe... it doesn't work with this device. But if we used the Bath."

"The Bath?" Bones asked, scooting up closer to him. The three were cuddled up close together on the bed, hanging on Spock's every word.

"Papa used the Bath, this... giant water container. I would close my eyes and then I could find people that way. Telepathically." he said, recalling all of the long words the scientists had used when writing down notes, "A sensory deprivation chamber, I think is what they called it."

Jim sat back, huffing, "Oh man, well, I don't have one of those on hand."

"And I wouldn't know the first thing about building one." Bones added.

Scotty threw his arms up in the air, "Uh, guys, hello? We already know somebody who can just tell us how to make one."

Bones rolled his eyes, "Who exactly would that be?"

Khan Noonien Singh was enjoying a lovely evening all to himself in front of the television when his phone rang. At first he ignored it, chalking it up to some salesperson or politician, but as it continued to ring he felt a strange little instinct to answer anyway, just in case it was someone he actually knew. He didn't bother to mute the television as he went over to the phone, picking it up.

"Hello, this is Khan Singh speaking."

A loud voice from the other end made him rear back from the

receiver, “Hey, Mr. Singh! It’s me, Montgomery Scott!”

“Scotty, what on... do you know what time it is?”

“Aww, it’s Friday night, you can’t tell me I have to go to bed early for a test or something.”

“No, I suppose I can’t.” Khan grinned, “So what can I do for you at this late hour on a Friday night, Scotty?”

“I need to know how to make a sensory deprivation tank.”

There was silence over the line for several seconds. Khan stared at the receiver wondering if he had right, but then he remembered who was calling and decided he hadn’t missed a thing. He rubbed his forehead, “Not that I’m expecting an answer as to *why* you need one of those, but couldn’t this wait until Monday?”

“You always say we should never stop being curious! Why are you keeping this curiosity door shut?”

“Curiosity door? I... okay, okay. Um... so, a sensory deprivation chamber? You got something to write with?”

He heard Scotty lunging for paper and knocking something over, followed by the sound of both Jim Kirk and Leonard McCoy yelling at him to watch out. Uh oh. If all three of those boys were working together on some kind of mad science experiment then who knows what they were planning to use this for.

Scotty came back on the line to let Khan know to continue, and with quite a bit of regret and the distinct impression that he was going to have a headache in the morning, Khan carefully listed out the way in which one could build a sensory deprivation tank.

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Pike was used to sleepless nights, and he was even used to spending it with a worried mother coping with the loss of a child. He was used to spending nights on the outskirts of town, driving down a lone dark road with only the lights of the police car to remind him he wasn’t totally lost. It was safe to say that between infrequent arrests, missing

pets, and the occasional bar fight, Pike had become emotionally numbed to whatever this small town in the middle of nowhere managed to cook up once every blue moon.

He wasn't used to finding listening bugs hidden in his lightbulbs. In all his time in Hawkins, he had never come home from an all-nighter to step into his trailer and feel the sudden, instinctive sense that someone else had been there.

First he combed through the most obvious locations: the phone, his wilting plants, in various cupboards and behind curtains. Nothing. But the feeling was still there, prickling at the back of his neck, and then his search began to get frantic. He finally thought to take apart one of the ceiling light fixtures and found it, the bug that no doubt had been placed in his trailer after his less than successful break-in at the Laboratory.

He looked around, shocked into clarity by his surroundings. Everything was scattered all across the floor, a chair tipped over, magazines dumped, an ashtray spilled, even his couch cushions were torn up. Had he really become so paranoid as to destroy his own house to find one little bug that might not have even been there?

But he had found it. And if they were trying to listen in on him then he knew a place they most certainly would have bugged, far more central to this whole damn business than his own little trailer.

He had barely spent twenty minutes inside his house from a night on the road, and he left right back out the way he came with a crushed listening bug in hand and car keys in the other. He had to warn the Chekov family.

~~~~~

Mariya Chekov raced to the front door and ripped it open, glad to see her suspicions were true and that it was the sheriff at her front door.

"Where have you been? I've been trying to call your phone for hours!" she snarled.

She stopped her tirade abruptly when she saw the sign he was

holding. It said to keep quiet because the house was... bugged? Her eyes widened as he pushed past her to look around her living room. He then began to check all of her lights and even some of her plants, until finally he found what he was looking for behind a couch cushion. He dumped it in a cup of water and then squashed it under his shoes for good measure. Then his shoulders visibly relaxed and he pulled a chair over to collapse on it, wiping sweat from his brow.

“Can we talk now?” Mariya whispered. When Pike nodded she relaxed slightly as well and sat down across from him at a table littered with missing person posters and dirty cups of coffee.

“So you’ve been trying to call me?” he asked.

Mariya nodded, “Yes, since this morning. Hikaru is missing! He went out yesterday afternoon and I haven’t seen him since!”

Pike held out his hands, “Now, now calm down, he’s probably just out with some friends...”

“He doesn’t have.... I mean, he doesn’t usually do this, not for this long without letting me at least know where he’s going.” her voice was increasingly lifting into high-pitched hysteria as she imagined losing not one but both of her boys and where could they be and what if they were hurt and lost somewhere and--

“Ms. Chekov? Ms. Chekov?” a comforting hand landed on her shoulder, pulling her out of her downward spiral. Pike hunched over close to her, eyes burdened with worry, “We’ll find him okay? He probably went out looking for Pavel like the rest of us have been doing. Did you call the station?”

She nodded, her face turning sour, “They wouldn’t listen though. Said the same things you are, that everything’s all right and I’m overreacting!”

“You’re not overreacting.” Pike assured her, “Considering the circumstances you’re well within your right to be concerned. But I need you to stay with me on this, okay? We’ll find them.”

She motioned to the living room, “And now my house has been



bugged. How long has that been there?"

"I don't know, I only discovered one in my trailer this morning. Now, can you tell me when you last saw Hikaru and give me any idea of where he might have gone?"

Mariya rubbed at her eyes and sighed, "Yesterday afternoon, after school. He'd just gotten home and then those kids showed up. Pavel's friends, they showed up making a ruckus about something. I watched them for a little bit but then went into Pavel's room to... well, anyway a while later Jim burst in like he was looking for something, but left right after that saying they all needed to go back to his house, and then his sister and Hikaru left awhile later in his car I think. Maybe he was going after them or somewhere else I don't know."

"That's good, that's good, that helps a lot! Do you know if Jim's sister returned home?"

As if to answer his question, his scanner buzzed and Christine from the station said something hard to understand. He asked for her to repeat.

*"I said Mrs. Kirk has called and she says her daughter Nyota is missing and has been since last night."*

Well shit. "Okay, thank you for letting me know I'll get onto that."

He returned his scanner to its place and turned to see a distraught expression on Mariya's face. Both of the teenagers were gone. Pike had been around enough to know that they were probably just making out somewhere, but to not have arrived back by the next morning? Still within the range of them being okay and just not telling their parents where they were going, but with Pavel missing so recently he couldn't let it go.

"Where are Pavel's friends now, do you know?"

Mariya shook her head, "No. They just came in here with some funny looking kid I'd never seen before. I didn't think anything of it you know, I didn't really listen to what they were saying."

Pike leaned forward, "Funny looking kid? How so?"

She shrugged, “Well I don’t know he just... I mean he was kinda pale, really thin, looked like he wasn’t being fed properly.”

He frowned, knowing before he asked that he was going to regret it, “Did he have pointed ears?”

She stared at him, then laughed, “Wow, and I thought I was the one sounding crazy!”

Well, worth a try at least.

“Although now that you mention it, he was wearing a beanie really snuggled over his ears so I couldn’t see much of them at all.” Mariya mused, tapping her finger on the table.

It couldn’t be, could it?

“Well, thank you Ms. Chekov and I’ll try and hunt those boys down to see if they know where Hikaru and Jim’s sister might be. Thank you, and please take care of yourself.” he said, glancing at the unwashed coffee mugs.

Mariya smiled blandly and watched him leave. She waited until after he was in his car to light a cigarette.

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They had spent all of thirty minutes in the Upside Down before the monster found them. Or rather, they stumbled upon it, tearing apart what looked to be the carcass of a deer. And then they spent the rest of the night -- if they could even differentiate between day and night there -- trying to run from the monster and find a hiding spot. Difficult to do in heavy hazmat suits, but Nyota was at least glad to have them because the air looked horrendously toxic. Which just made her even more terrified for Pavel’s safety. How could anyone survive in this cold, dark, toxic land for one day much less several?

They ended up hiding in her basement. It was creepy to see a place she knew so well turned into an ash-littered vacant place. The upstairs were choked with vines, and since electricity didn’t appear to be available in the Upside Down they settled for sitting in the dark, secure only in the knowledge that the monster couldn’t walk through

walls.

Hikaru sat across from her with a stone-hardened face, staring into nothing as he absently chipped away at a piece of wood they had found which he was now turning into a spear. It was barely anything against such a terrifying creature, but it was still better than nothing. He only looked up when he noticed Nyota was shivering.

“You don’t suppose we have some way of keeping warm, do you?” she asked, rubbing her arms. The bodysuit she had been forced to wear was neither comfortable nor held heat all that well.

Hikaru sighed and shook his head, “Unless you know some way to build a fire from scratch?”

Nyota did not answer so he stood up and paced the room, trying to keep himself warm that way. He stopped when he heard his stomach growl, and did his best to ignore the creeping hunger reminding him he’d barely eaten since Pavel had gone missing. Unless they found another deer corpse somewhere it didn’t look like they’d be eating too much.

“You don’t suppose there would still be food in the refrigerator?” Nyota asked.

It was highly unlikely, but they tried anyway. To their astonishment, they did find some frozen food there, nothing that easily spoiled as all of that seemed to have rotted away, but there were some waffles and a slab of ham and some cans of soda.

Hikaru’s stomach growled again and he took one of the waffles, biting down hard into it. Nyota watched him with faint amusement, until she noticed her own stomach grumbling in sympathy and decided to eat as well. It was all hard and cold, but what else could they expect from such a cruel place. How did this parallel world, if it could be called that, come to be so broken and harsh toward life? And how could they get back, or was that even an option?

She shied away from thinking about spending the rest of her life in the Upside Down. They had to find a way, or they’d die trying, but she certainly wasn’t going to spend her remaining time sadly

munching on frozen waffles and waiting to be eaten by that prowling monster.

“Don’t worry, we’ll figure something out.” Hikaru said softly, staring across the vine-covered floor as if his thoughts were wandering in the same direction as hers. They finished their waffles and then moved back to the basement, if only so they wouldn’t imagine the monster watching them from the windows and trying to find a way in.

Notes for the Chapter:

So I kinda realise in hindsight that depending on which version of the characters you picture them as, this could look like Pike talking with Winona Ryder only to go over and talk to also Winona Ryder. Ha ha whoops, guess it is a small world after all.

And before you comment on choosing Khan as the science teacher: please imagine Ricardo Montalbán in all his beefy glory sitting behind a school desk excitedly talking about planets and mitochondria or attending PTA meetings in an ugly sweater, and you’ll see why I couldn’t pass up the opportunity. I was fumbling about for a choice of character and his was just too good.

8. Some Things Aren't Meant to be Replaced

Summary for the Chapter:

THE FINAL CHAPTER HOORAY!!!! I loved writing this and I appreciate all of the comments and kudos that have kept me going. Hopefully you enjoy these nerds as much as I do and you will like the ending I have selected for them. Thank you and I'd love to hear any comments you might have!

To avoid Bones' dad finding out they were there, Bones had the unfortunate task of staying inside the house and pretending everything was fine while the others slept out in the bus. He had given them some old blankets and his best wishes, the unspoken knowledge between all of them that no adult was safe now that they were fugitives.

"But there must be somebody we can talk to." Scotty whispered while they shivered folded up in their seats.

Jim shrugged, "Hikaru and Nyota were our best bet. Maybe Pavel's mom would believe us, but she seems pretty stressed out. Maybe Sheriff Pike?"

Scotty hummed and nodded, curling up into himself as he tried to think of a solution to their problem.

"Don't worry, we can go back to my house in the morning. I was supposed to sleep over at your house anyway, so my mom won't freak out until after lunchtime. Besides, the bad men will be gone by then."

"Will they?" Scotty peered into the darkness, biting his lip.

Jim couldn't answer that. He was usually the top of his class, the one who read a ton of books and knew a lot of trivial knowledge when pop quizzes came around. He was used to knowing stuff. But all of that stopped when it came to Spock and the Laboratory.

He twisted around to look at Spock, who lay in a pile of blankets on the floor. They have offered him a seat but he had declined, saying only that he was used to sleeping on the floor. Now, he looked like a small kitten shivering in the cold, trying to get warm and failing.

Jim slipped out of his seat and dragged his blankets over to sit next to where Spock lay. The boy opened one eye and frowned at the sight of him, "Why are you not trying to rest?"

"You looked cold; thought we could keep each other warm." Jim fumbled.

"My body temperature is naturally higher than that of humans," Spock explained quietly, "Papa said it was the same for the others as well. So they kept my room slightly warmer."

"Oh... do you mind if I cuddle up with you then?" Jim asked.

Spock stared at him for a moment but then laid back on his side, and since he was not objecting Jim took that to be his way of saying yes. Hesitating, he laid down next to Spock, and when he tentatively wrapped an arm around Spock's chest he was surprised to find Spock quickly scooted back into his body to enjoy the added warmth.

"Are you... purring?" he asked after a few seconds of a strange rumbling coming from Spock's chest.

"Yes." Spock mumbled, "Now sleep."

Jim suppressed a grin against Spock's shoulder, "Okay. Goodnight Spock."

"Will you two shut up." Scotty growled.

They ended up shushing each other for a minute before they all settled into a restless sleep. All of them were plagued with nightmares, where monsters and men in suits lingered in swirling ash.

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Pike had been planning to simply drive up to the Kirk's house and

knock of the door, asking to talk to the boys. But when he rounded the curve and saw the Kirk house swarming with government agents, he cursed and quickly drove the other way, parking out of sight before walking up to a point where he could get a better view. If the boys were in there they had most likely already been questioned by the men from the Lab, and considering both Hikaru and Nyota were uncharacteristically missing, he was feeling more disturbed by the minute.

Rustling in the bushes behind him caught his attention and he whirled around in time to see a very exhausted-looking Scotty push himself out of the bramble, followed by Bones and Jim. When they saw him they tried to turn around and run back the way they came, but Pike held out his hands, "Hey, it's okay, I'm here to help you."

The boys glared at him suspiciously. Pike explained further how he was there to talk to them about the missing siblings. When he mentioned their names the boys glanced at each other with silent dread, Jim's shoulders sagging.

"We need to get home soon, or my mom will be worried about me too."

"I'm afraid that's not possible." Pike said grimly, "Several people from the Hawkins National Laboratory are already there and it appears they have already gotten permission to search through your belongings."

"What!" Jim shouted. He lowered his voice immediately and looked guilty, but when nobody outside the group seemed to have heard them he continued, "So they're in there with my parents?"

"It would seem so, but I highly doubt they would harm them. As long as your parents aren't a threat to them they will leave them alone."

"Glad they didn't go to my house." Bones grumbled, smirking in unison with Scotty.

Just then, another boy stepped out from behind Jim, plucking leaves out of his straight black hair. He took off the beanie he was wearing to pull out some twigs and Pike gasped, staring at the boys ears in

disbelief.

So it was true.

The boy with the pointed ears stared up at him as if daring him to say something, but Pike simply nodded to him and the anger in the boy's eyes subsided. He brushed a hand against Jim's and the two stood close together as Bones walked past Pike to see the Kirk house.

He let out a low whistle, "Damn, they really brought out the big guns didn't they? I don't know what they told your mom but I'm surprised she isn't on the front lawn having a meltdown."

Jim and the boy walked over to see what Bones was commenting on and Jim grimaced. The boy with the pointed ears turned to speak directly to Pike.

"Will you help us? I can find Pavel, but I need a lot of supplies."

Pike's eyebrows shot up, "You know where Pavel Chekov is?"

"It's too complicated to explain here, just take his word for it." Scotty said.

Pike sighed but nodded his head, "All right, what do you need?"

"1,500 pounds of salt and a kiddie pool." Bones interrupted, "Also we need to fill that pool with water, a blindfold, and maybe a carton of eggs."

"A... a sensory deprivation pool?" Pike asked, completely bewildered. He was even more shocked when all of the boys agreed excitedly. Where on earth would they get that much salt so quickly? Perhaps they could go to a store and buy it, but when he suggested this option the boys immediately said no, glancing around nervously.

"What about the school then?" Jim asked.

"I've always wanted to break into the school when no one else was there." Scotty said.

"Then we might have to wait awhile," Bones explained, "There's still



teachers there during the day, even on weekends, plus the kids in detention. We'll have to wait till at least this afternoon if we want to make sure no one else sees us."

"But what are we supposed to do before then? We can't wait that much longer to find Pavel!" Jim cried.

"I'll tell you what you kids can do, you can help me figure out where Hikaru and Nyota went." Pike said, squatting down so he was roughly eye level with them, "I saw the looks on your faces when I brought them up, you know something. When was the last time you saw your sister and Hikaru?"

Jim fidgeted, "We thought they would be okay. At least we hoped they would."

"But *where* are they? What happened?"

He sniffed, rubbing at his eyes, "We were biking back from Pavel's house when a bunch of vans came up behind us. We tried to outrun them but that's really hard to do on a bike. We thought the bad men were about to get us but then Hikaru pulled in between us and the vans so his car was blocking the road, and Nyota was with him."

"They tried to buy you time, huh?"

Jim nodded, "They got out and told us to run away while they held the men off. We didn't see them after that. I thought they'd get back in the car before the men could do anything to them, I didn't want them to get hurt!"

"I know you didn't. And I'm glad you told me. But this does mean we've got three missing kids on our hands, two of whom are probably already somewhere within that Laboratory."

Scotty gasped, "Do you think they're in the Upside Down too?"

"What?" Pike asked, unsure if he heard correctly

"It's why we need the pool." Bones said, gesturing to the strange boy.

Ah yes, the enigma that had been weaving itself through this

troubling mystery since the beginning. Pike knelt down in front of the boy, glancing again at his otherworldly pointed ears. He tried to think of a best approach, but ended up asking, "Are you an alien?"

The boy did not seem too perturbed at the blunt question. He instead answered, "I am Spock. I lived inside the Lab until the monster got out."

"You escaped then. And... do you know who your parents are?" Pike held his breath.

Spock frowned, "I have Papa. But there is no one else like me, if that is what you mean."

"I thought you said last night that there were others who also got really cold?" Jim spoke up.

"Yes, but the others died before I was old enough to remember. I only know what Papa told me of them." he turned back to Pike, "I do not know who gave birth to me, if that is what you mean."

Pike stood up, letting out a long sigh. He had a suspicion this was going to be a very long day, and the trouble had barely started.

"I've got some phone calls to make, you kids figure out where you're gonna find a kiddie pool."

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They met back up again at the school right as it was turning dark. Pike had called both Mariya and Amanda, figuring they at least had a right to know what was going on. Both responded with similar variations of: "that's my son you're talking about of course I'm coming!"

Mariya showed up soon after and helped him lug the de-icing salt out of storage. By the time they had finished there, the kids were already gathered around an almost-inflated pool where a hose was steadily pumping out water.

After they had poured several bags of salt into the pool, Scotty was sent to fetch eggs from the cafeteria kitchen, skipping back with a

cartoon proudly clutched in his arms. His smile fell when they had to go through most of the eggs before they could successfully make an egg float on the salt.

“You know, when I was back there looking for the eggs I saw a whole stash of that chocolate pudding the lunch lady keeps saying she doesn’t have enough of. I swear she hoards it!” Scotty said.

Bones scowled at him but the rest of the group smiled, knowing Scotty was only trying his best to lighten the somber mood in the gym. Mariya took the blindfold and walked over to Spock, sitting down on her knees to talk to him directly.

“You... are very brave, do you know that, Spock?” she said, managing a smile, “You are so brave, I can’t thank you enough for doing this, for trying to find my son.”

Spock simply stared at her, unsure of how to answer such a forward display of emotion. In the end he took the blindfold from her and walked over to the pool, slipping it over his eyes and then letting himself be guided by Jim into the pool. As he stepped into the water, the ripples echoed around the gym, and everyone tried to stay perfectly silent as Spock floated in the middle of the pool, arms and legs spread out as he tried to focus. To bring himself back to the black void.

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“Pavel?” he asked, looking around. There was nothing but pure darkness in every direction. “Pavel... Pavel!”

Silence. He thought he could hear water echo beneath his feet, but he ignored it as he walked further into the darkness, calling out Pavel’s name. He tried hard to concentrate. If only he could have meditated beforehand, but there wasn’t time now, they were counting on him, they had nowhere else to go but--

A sob. Spock turned to see the broken hull of the Enterprise, battered with wind and age and giving in to creeping vines. He crept closer, and with each step the sobs grew louder, till he pushed aside the tatters of the door to see a hunched form inside.

The boy did not react to his presence. It was as if he wasn't even there. Spock crawled over close, and when he touched him Pavel sat up and looked at him with wide eyes.

"You? It's you!" he coughed, arms limp at his sides. There was a long gash down his arm from where the monster must have attacked him. A foot away from him was the walkie talkie Spock had seen before, lying useless and discarded.

"We're coming to get you, I promise." Spock said, trying to pour all of his confidence and trust into his touch. Pavel relaxed slightly, but still crouched in fear.

Suddenly, the image of Pavel and the Enterprise faded from existence, back into black again, and Spock sat there with empty arms. He had hoped for more time, but at least Pavel was in a place he already knew.

Then, he heard other voices, and he turned to see two figures in hazmat suits trampling through the darkness, ash kicked up by their footsteps. He rushed over to where they were, and the two stopped, as if sensing he was there but unable to see. With a startle, he realised who he was seeing. He reached out his hand and touched the arm of Nyota, and she stared at him in shock.

"Whoa, who are you? How did you just appear out of nowhere?" she asked. Hikaru beside her looked even more confused. He gestured around, asking what it was Nyota saw.

"If you touch him will he be able to see you?" she asked, and Spock nodded, doing the same for Hikaru. He jumped as Spock appeared in his vision.

The two started to ask him many questions, but he knew they had limited time. He couldn't hold his concentration forever and the void decided how long he was able to see these specters from another world. He tugged on their arms.

"You have to find Pavel, you are the ones who can save him. He is hiding in the Enterprise, and you must watch out for the monster!"

“Yeah, we’ve already had the pleasure of meeting that thing.” Hikaru said.

“The Enterprise? That place my brother and his friends used to hang out at in the woods?”

Spock opened his mouth to say yes, but only got so far as nodding when the two began to disappear, crumbling in his grasp. He had little time to think before everything came crashing down, and he emerged from the pool gasping for breath and fumbling about. A warm hand gripped his own and Jim helped take off his blindfold, murmuring reassurances that everything was alright and he was safe.

Scotty and Bones were there with them, along with Mariya who also helped Spock out of the pool. Spock did his best to recall everything he had encountered while in the void. They listened to his story with dread, and eventually Mariya muttered something about going out to join Pike for a smoke, leaving the boys to stay safe in the gym.

Scotty kicked at a bleacher, huffing, “Well, if we’re just gonna have to sit around and wait for Hikaru and Nyota to find Pavel then we might as well do it on a full stomach. I’m going to get that chocolate pudding.”

Bones joined him and the two rushed off together. Spock and Jim sat on the bleachers in silence, staring out at the empty room and the pool. Even if Nyota and Hikaru found Pavel, what guarantee did they have of them getting back? *Could* they go back whatever way they came, or was the gate to the Upside Down only one-way for humans?

No. Jim couldn’t let his anxiety drag him down like this. He instead tried to focus his thoughts on Spock.

It wasn’t hard. Spock had intrigued him since the moment he found him in the Enterprise. Those big, brown eyes staring back at him, the small, almost undetectable smile whenever he said something Spock thought was amusing. He could tell that Spock was so used to being forced to hide his emotions, to push down all urges to laugh or yell or react in any other way than was logical. But maybe some of that could be reversed.

“Hey, um...” he rubbed the back of his neck, looking over at Spock, “So, I was wondering, there’s an end-of-the-year dance coming up soon. Well, a couple of months from now really, but um, I was wondering... would you like to go to that with me?”

Spock’s ear perked up, “A dance? I am unfamiliar with this.”

Jim shrugged, wincing, “You know it’s, well it’s where you get together in a place like this, the gym or the lunchroom or something, and they have food and drinks there and people dance. Or, well, mostly people stand around and talk but dancing can be fun. Dancing is... well lemme show you.” He hopped up and began to dance, enjoying the look of pleased surprise on Spock’s face.

“It seems interesting.” Spock mused, a smile playing on his lips, “I think I should like to go to this ‘dance’.”

Jim sat down again, “Yeah, and we could go together you know.”

“As a friend?” Spock asked, tilting his head.

Jim shuffled nervously, “Not... not exactly. I mean I guess friends can go together but like, you usually go as... more than friends.”

“More?”

Jim tried to think of a way to explain. To explain how he felt, how he couldn’t stop smiling when he thought of Spock, how he liked being cuddled up to him the night before. He didn’t know how, he didn’t really have the words to describe it, so instead he went with his gut instinct and leaned forward, brushing his lips against Spock’s.

Kissing wasn’t what it seemed like on TV. But he was surprised to feel a shock of emotion surge through his lips, and Spock gasped, rearing back in shock.

“Oh, I, I, I’m sorry!” Jim said, turning his head down, “I thought you’d like it.”

“I do,” Spock said simply, gingerly touching his lips, “I was merely caught off guard. It is strange, I believe I have felt this sensation before when touching you.”

Jim looked up again, “Oh?”

“Yes it... it was brief, and I did not know what it was, but I have found I enjoy it.” Spock’s cheeks were rapidly turning green, and he held out two of his fingers. Jim offered the same, and Spock gently pressed their fingers together. Again Jim felt a sense of wonder and excitement flow through their touch, and he could tell from Spock’s face that the act was even more pleasurable for him.

“So when we hold hands, we’re basically kissing?” he asked, blushing.

“It would appear so.”

“Would you like to do it again?” he asked, teasing. Spock seemed to catch onto his tone but readily agreed anyway, leaning forward to place a kiss on Jim’s lips.

Just then, a bright light flashed through the windows. They turned in time to see floodlights throwing the doors of the gym into a glaring halo, as silhouettes shut car doors and headed towards the entrance.

The two immediately latched onto each other and took off for the doors leading to the hallways. They had to find Bones and Scotty before the bad men did, and who knew if they were still feasting on pudding or somewhere else in the building by now. They could hear shouting behind them as the men had apparently now spotted the pool. It would be an instant giveaway that Spock had been there.

They burst into the kitchen in time to nearly run over Bones. Scotty stood behind him with an armload of pudding cups.

“We need to get out of here! It’s the bad men, they’re here at the school!” Jim shouted. Scotty dropped the pudding and they left the cups in a pile on the kitchen floor, knowing that if the men found it they would know they were there, but not having enough time to clean up. Bones lead the way down the halls, quickly trying to scout out an exit without running into any major hallways.

“Freeze!” a voice yelled from behind. The group turned as four agents all rounded a corner and came to stand a few feet from them, guns

at the ready. They were lead by a woman with a cruel smile, and she called on a scanner to let a Dr. Marcus know they had found the kids.

*“Keep Spock alive, you can shoot the rest.”* a familiar voice said on the other end.

Spock gasped, unable to believe what he had heard. Papa couldn't have said that, surely he wouldn't! But it was there, evidence laid bare before him. Papa was willing to kill his only friends.

He heard guns being readied to fire and instinctively lashed out. It was like the 25th day all over again. Running, trying to escape, not fast enough. Never fast enough. Trapped, a wounded animal in a cage learning how to put up a fight. He stared right into the woman's eyes as blood poured out of hers, and quickly she and her men dropped to the floor, dead.

He collapsed, knowing vaguely that someone was calling his name, trying to save him. Then he opened his eyes and there was only Papa, running his fingers through Spock's hair.

“Let's go home now, Spock. We'll go home and everything will be okay again.” Papa said. It hurt, but Spock managed to shrug himself out of Papa's arms, dizzy as he tried to keep his balance on his own. He had to do this by himself, for himself.

“No.” he said firmly, “I'm not going back.”

Papa stared at him in shock, but Spock paid no attention to him. He instead noticed Jim and Bones and Scotty being held back by guards, and just as Spock felt the urge to do the same thing to those men and the guards before, the lights flickered on and off.

Everyone froze, worriedly glancing at each other for confirmation. Spock shut his eyes and cringed. The blood. Why had he been so foolish as to forget the monster was attracted to blood!

The wall next to them suddenly burst and crumbled, and in its place the gaping jaws of the monster lunged for a nearby gunman. Papa ordered his men to fire, bullets ricocheting off the beast' hide with little effect. Spock felt Jim tugging at his arm, and though he was still



incredibly weak, he willed his feet to move. Scotty and Bones held him up at his sides, and together they rushed to a classroom. Spock was carefully laid down in a seat before the boys rushed to barricade the door closed, backing away from it and trying to stay quiet.

Outside they could hear the screams of men being torn limb from limb. Spock put his hands over his ears when he heard Papa do the same, and tried to imagine he was somewhere else, anywhere else but here.

Then all was quiet. None of the boys dared say anything, holding their breath as they strained to hear any signs of what had happened to the creature. If it was still alive, would it really be stopped by a locked door?

Apparently, the answer was no. The door was kicked into splinters as the monster tore through, shrieking and shoving their pitiful barricade away. The boys backed up to the other side of the room, but there was nowhere left to run. It began to stalk closer to them, seemingly taking its time enjoying the fear radiating from its trapped victims. Bones started to throw textbooks at it, and he and Scotty grabbed a desk, heaving it at the monster. Everything bounced off it.

“Throw something, anything, what do we have?” Jim yelled.

“I don’t know I don’t know I don’t know!” Scotty howled.

“Take this!” Bones screamed, chucking a large fire extinguisher at it. Just as it hit the monster square in the forehead, the creature rocketed back, slamming into the chalkboard and staying there, as if pinned for display. Bones squinted in confusion, and then they all looked back at Spock in unison. He stood there, green blood trickling out of his nose and ears as he made his way to the front of the classroom. A wind whipped through the room as papers flew everywhere and desks skidded to the side as Spock made a path up to where the monster struggled against his grip. It roared in rage and put up a fight, and Sock winced, tripping and grappling to stay up as the stronger monster slowly gained ground.

The pain coursed through his body, ripping through his skin and searing his blood. He screamed, tears streaking his cheeks as he tried

to hold on, to obliterate the monster once and for all. But it was so strong, and he was so weak and tiny, and he just wanted to go to sleep and let the pain take its toll. To wander back into the black void.

Then, a sweetness. Something small, but there, someone he was vaguely aware of stepping through the crushed door. He could not see anything, but he could feel her presence. Comforting, guiding, powerful.

The monster blasted back onto the chalkboard, pieces of it tearing apart. Spock refocused his efforts and found with her help he could now easily rip the monster to shreds, so that it would never harm anyone ever again, not his friends, not Jim, not Pavel, or... or...

The wind stilled. Papers fell scattered on the ground. The boys edged forward, Jim launching over desks and chairs to get to the crumpled little boy on the ground. Spock lay there in a daze, staring up at the face of a woman whom he did not recognize but felt oddly close to. She gasped, tears prickling her eyes as she gently cupped his face in her hands, kneeling down by him and quietly repeating, "I missed you so much, I'm sorry baby, I'm so sorry."

"Spock? Spock!" Jim cried, rushing to Spock's side. He clasped Spock's hand and watched as the boy offered a feeble smile, trying to focus on that small bit of warmth as the pain pounded in his bones.

The wall was still whirling as the last bits of the monster slipped away, but before the rift closed two teenagers in hazmat suits fell through it, coughing and sputtering and crying tears of joy. Nyota looked around at her surroundings in disbelief, holding out her arms to catch Jim in a hug. Hikaru did not notice any of this, however, holding tight to the small and unconscious body of Pavel. The boy was breathing, thanks to Hikaru's suit and breathing mask, but when Hikaru noticed there was an adult in the room he looked up at her with pleading eyes.

"We have to get Pavel to a hospital immediately, please!"

Amanda smiled, still running a soothing hand along her son's arm, "Your sheriff made sure to call both the police and an ambulance

when he saw that those agents had arrived at the school. I believe he and your mother put quite a dent in the number of guards that managed to head your way.”

Hikaru smirked, nodding knowingly. Leave it to his mom to attack an armed force with nothing but sheer determination.

As a group, they made their way out to where medical staff were, watching as both Spock and Pavel were loaded into ambulances. Jim wanted badly to go with them, but he found himself instead caught up in the arms of his mother, who kissed him and his sister both. He grinned at the sight of Nyota in a strange bodysuit, and she playfully shoved him, threatening to blackmail him if he ever told another soul about this.

Pike stood well away from the reuniting families, knowing it wasn't the time to intrude. Instead, he lit a cigarette and peered up at the night sky, listening to the sounds of laughter and joy as the stars passed above them.

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2 months later

“Ow! Quit pinching me!” Jim yelled.

“It wouldn't pinch if you just let me put on your tie like a normal human being.” Nyota said, wrestling with the cheap tie they had picked out for the dance. Jim was practically vibrating with energy.

“Is my hair supposed to look like this?”

“Yes, that's what your hair looks like when it's not a tangled mop on top of your head. Now hold still.” his mother countered, tugging extra hard with the hairbrush just to reiterate her point. The two women snickered as Jim scowled, checking his watch yet again.

“Don't worry sweetie, they'll get here when they get here.” his mother said.

It didn't help much, but Jim managed to stay still long enough for them to finish. He then checked to make sure everything was

absolutely perfect before rushing off down the stairs at the sound of the doorbell ringing.

He opened the door with a wide grin and then groaned at the sight of Scotty.

“Thanks for welcoming me in, I feel loved.” Scotty said, skipping into the front hall in the finest dress outfit Jim had ever seen him in. He was quickly followed by Bones, who fidgeted with his bowtie.

“You sure we have to wear matching colors?” he asked Scotty.

“Yes *of course* , you don’t want to arrive there and people think we’re just bumming around by ourselves for the punch.”

“Which is exactly where you’ll be for most of the evening.” Bones said.

“Of course.” Scotty flashed him a cheeky smile.

Before the two could launch into another conversation, there was a knock at the door and Jim opened it quickly, grinning when he saw it was Spock. He ushered him in and the other two whistled at them and laughed.

Spock ignored them and turned to Jim, holding out a small bundle of flowers, “I was told this was the appropriate gift to give upon going to formal events.”

Jim took the flowers, taking time to smell them before admiring Spock’s suit, “You look great. Really.”

“C’mom guys, let’s hurry up, we don’t want to be late!” a voice called, and Pavel popped up from the door to wave at them. They all crowded around Pavel in surprise.

“I thought you weren’t going?” Bones asked.

Pavel shrugged, “Hikaru and Mom keep singing out loud in the kitchen to that new record they bought. I figured if I have to listen to music I’ll do it with my friends.”

“Sap.” Bones replied, shoving them all out the door, “Okay, okay, let’s go get those free cookies and punch!”

The group of loud boys cheered and hustled off into the car waiting for them, and Amanda seemed to have no problem being surrounded by excited shouting and hand waving as she drove.

It almost didn’t seem real, to have Spock back in her life, and it was good to have moments like this where everything was noisy and there and present in a way things never had been before. She glanced over at her son and smiled, noticing that he was quietly holding hands again with Jim. Sarek would have been proud to see his son happy and loved by friends who dragged him off to silly school dances.

It was worth it, and it was theirs to keep. Some small things, like this, were never meant to be replaced.